

## St. Thérèse of Lisieux, O.C.D. "A living Witness of the Gospel"

by Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD

During his visit to the Basilica of Lisieux, on June 2, 1980, Pope John Paul II said: "Of Thérèse of Lisieux, one can say with conviction that the Spirit of God permitted her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the fundamental mystery, the fundamental reality of the Gospel: the fact of having really received the spirit of adopted children which makes us cry "Abba Father". The Little Way is the way of holy childhood; in it, there is at one and the same time the confirmation and the renewal of the most fundamental and universal truth. What truth of the Gospel message is in fact more fundamental and more universal than this: "God is our Father and we are his children." Living as a child is truly at the heart of the life of Jesus.

It is an undeniable fact that, as Abbe Cambes says in his book "The Spirituality of St. Thérèse", the great doctors of Carmel, St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, have guided to the lofty summits of perfection chosen souls who are the joy and the glory of the Church. But where shall we find an average soul who is ready to believe that St. Teresa of Jesus, and still more St. John of the Cross, teach truths and doctrines that are within its grasp? They are eagles who rise up towards the Divine Sun those souls who have already advanced far in the way of perfection; but on the other side, they have a tendency to frighten those souls whose eyes and wings are yet weak.

When we examine the life and teachings of the humble nun of Lisieux we have to confess that her teaching is more attractive to people like myself. First she closed all her books, except the Gospel; then she gave herself in unreserved acceptance of the Cross, even unto death, following the footsteps of Jesus her master. Before beginning to speak to the world and exercise her divinely appointed mission to it, she performed an amazing number of astonishing miracles. At her intercession, the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the deaf regained their hearing, the sick were healed, and the sorrowful were comforted. The days when our Lord walked upon earth were thus recalled, and then came the last miracle, the miracle that Jesus Christ placed above the raising of the dead. To what miracle am I referring? Listen to the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew. When John (the Baptist) heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and (listen to the greatest miracle) the poor have good news brought to them." (Mt. 11.2-5)

St. Thérèse is one of those noble instruments that God has used to clarify for us this important statement of truth in the Gospel: "the poor have good news brought to them." Notice dear brothers and sisters the beauty and exactness of the translation of the N.R.S.V. (New Revised Standard Version): "the poor have good news brought to them; "it isn't preached" but "brought", that is something which is not within reach is brought to us by grace within reach! St. Thérèse's message has come to our sick world like a breath of fresh air from the Gospel. It is true that the Bible is the medicine chest for the sickness of humanity. But where are we going to find that person who has the experience and knowledge to teach us how to apply this medicine of the Word of God? Here the Apostle from Lisieux comes to our rescue. Pope Benedict XV proclaimed that Thérèse had brought to humanity "the secret of sanctity". In his turn Pope Pius XI declared that she is a "word of God descended from heaven to reveal to us the way of spiritual childhood and she has traced for us a sure way of

salvation."(2) Speaking about the "sure way" that Pope Pius XI mentioned in his homily it is useful to recall the words of Thérèse herself to her novices: "If I lead you into error with my Little Way of Love, be not afraid that I shall permit you to follow it for any length of time. I would soon re-appear after my death and tell you to take another. But if I do not return, believe me when I tell you that we never have too much confidence in the Good Lord who is so powerful and merciful. We obtain from Him as much as we hope for." (3) Needless to say that Thérèse did not return to correct her teaching; however, on the 16th of January, 1910 she did appear to the Prioress of the Carmel of Gallipoli in Italy and told her: "My way is sure and I was not misguided in following it."

It doesn't take a scholar to discover the love, and may I call it "obsession", which Thérèse had for the Holy Scriptures. Though it may be true that as Guy Gaucher says: "Thérèse never had in her possession a complete Bible, nonetheless like Mary Our Mother, she treasured in her heart any word from the Scriptures that she happened to come in contact with." Allow me to trace for you a few events and references which manifest Thérèse's love for the Word of God. In chapter VI (Manuscript A) of her autobiography: "Story of a Soul" Thérèse gives us a vivid description of her travels to Rome, the place about which she says: "Rome, the place I looked for consolation and found the Cross." In the same chapter further down she writes: "For six days we looked at all the principal wonders of Rome; on the seventh I saw the greatest of them all - Pope Leo XIII ... On Sunday morning, 20th November, we entered the Holy Father's private chapel in the Vatican, and attended his Mass at 8:00 o'clock. His fervour at the altar, worthy of the Vicar of Christ, showed him to be really the Holy Father. The Gospel of the day contained these encouraging words: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12.32). A lively confidence took possession of my heart, my fears vanished, and I was sure that the Kingdom of Carmel would soon be mine. I was forgetting His other words: "I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom." (Luke 22.29), in other words "I have reserved for you the cross of trial, to make you worthy of my Kingdom." "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24.26). "If you desire to sit on His right hand you must drink the chalice which He has drunk Himself" (cfr. Matthew 20.20-23).

The reason why I quoted this paragraph from the Story of a Soul is twofold.

First to show that indeed Thérèse, like the young Samuel in the Old Testament, she did not leave any of the words of the Lord fall to the ground (1 Samuel 3.19).

Secondly, when we have a closer look at the paragraph just quoted from the Story of a Soul, we are surprised to discover that in such a short paragraph she quotes the Gospel text from four different references, i.e. Luke 12,32; Luke 22.29; Luke 24.26 and Matthew 22.22.

Thérèse's love for the Holy Scripture is also seen from her capacity to see Scriptural texts talking and jumping at her through the events of every-day life. Notice once more her description of an experience during her pilgrimage to Italy: "The day after the unforgettable audience (with the Pope), we had to leave for Naples and Pompeii. Vesuvius, with a dense column of smoke rising from its crater, fired a salute in our honour. While the havoc it had wrought in Pompeii was frightful, the power of God was there: "He looks on the earth and it trembles, He touches the mountains and they smoke." (Psalm 104.32). To have the facility to apply Scripture in the way Thérèse applies it, is by no means within the grasp of any ordinary person at the age of 23 years. In

reading the writings of Thérèse one can easily see that the Scriptures were her direct contact with God and his Word. So it is not a surprise to see her abandoning all other books in order to devote herself entirely to the study of Scripture.

At the age of fourteen she was inseparable from "The Imitation of Christ"; no matter where she opened it she could recite to the end of the chapter by heart. "It was the only book which helped me for I had not as yet discovered the treasures which are hidden in Sacred Scriptures. I carried this little book around with me at all times" she tells us. In her development it acted as a preparation for the Scriptures and remained the one other book which she could read: "During this period of being unable to read, the only help I received is from Sacred Scripture and the Imitation of Christ; in them I found a hidden, pure and strong manna." Then at the age of seventeen or eighteen there comes an intermezzo; she discovers St. John of the Cross: "What light have I not been granted from the writings of St. John of the Cross.

At seventeen or eighteen I had no other nourishment". Her novice-mistress was amazed at her understanding of this mystic. One of the novices of Thérèse testified that Thérèse could recite long passages from the "Living Flame" and the "Spiritual Canticle" by heart. Yet, as Hans Urs von Balthasar says, in his book "Thérèse of Lisieux", Thérèse only quoted St. John of the Cross to express her own thoughts, or - even more frequently - to adopt his allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. She never adopted his "System"; this simply served her as a guide to the Scriptures and enabled her above all, to understand how the Old Testament foreshadows the Gospels. And so all that remains eventually is Scripture. Thérèse tells us "It is from here that I derive everything my poor little soul needs. I constantly receive fresh illuminations and detect new, hidden meanings. I can find nothing in books anymore; the Gospels are enough for me. Is it not implied, for example, in the words of Our Lord, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart?" "How sweet to learn nothing except from the mouth of Jesus". And so Thérèse asks Our Lord: "Reveal to me the hidden mysteries of the Gospel! Oh that golden book is my most precious treasure." Did you hear that expression: "That golden book is my most precious treasure." side by side to this important statement we can place the words of Pope Pius XI on Thérèse.

In his homily which Pius XI preached after the Gospel at the Canonization of St. Thérèse, May 17, 1925, he said: "Blessed be God and the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies, and God of all consolation; who in the midst of the countless cares of our apostolic ministry, has granted us the joy of inscribing as our first Saint in the calendar the Virgin who was also the first to be beatified by us, at the beginning of our Pontificate. This maiden became a child in the order of grace, but her spirit of childhood was united to such greatness of soul that, in accordance with the promises of Christ, she merited to be glorified before the Church upon earth, as well as in the Heavenly Jerusalem. We give thanks to God likewise for permitting us, who hold the place of His Only Son, to repeat insistently today from this chair of truth and during this solemn ceremony the salutary teaching of the Divine Master. "When the disciples asked: "Who will be the greater in the kingdom of Heaven?" calling a child and setting him in their midst, He pronounced these memorable words: "Truly, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18.2).

The new St. Thérèse had learned thoroughly this teaching of the Gospels and had translated it into her daily life. Further on in his homily the Pope said: "Thus Thérèse appeared more angelic than human in her practice of truth and justice, endowed as she was with the simplicity of a child ... The maid of Lisieux had ever in

memory the invitation and the promises of her spouse: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me." (Proverbs 9.4). "You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you; as one whom the Mother caresseth, so will I comfort you." (Isaiah 66.12-13)

These two last quotations from the Old Testament are the two inspirational texts upon which Thérèse was to base her so-called "Little Way". Proverbs chapter 9.4; and Isaiah 66.12-13. Allow me to quote once more the homily of Pope Pius XI; "Above all, Thérèse nourished her heart and soul with the inspired Word of God on which she meditated assiduously, and (notice the Pope's terminology) "the Spirit of Truth taught her what He hides as a rule from the wise and prudent and reveals to the humble. Indeed, God enriched her with a quite exceptional wisdom so that she was enabled to trace out for others a sure way of salvation." (Homily of Pope Pius XI on the occasion of Thérèse's Canonization).

Thérèse in her ardent desire to be a saint, and as she says: "not one by halves", she runs into a wall of great mortifications which proved too much for her. So, far from being discouraged with these steep steps towards perfection, she said: "I will look for a means of reaching Heaven which offers a perfectly straight, short and completely new little way. "The way, in fact, of a "lift" which simply avoids the "steep steps towards perfection". She knew exactly what she needed.

Secure in this knowledge she approaches the Scriptures: "I looked for the desired lift in the Sacred Scriptures, and found the words, 'Whosoever is a little one, let him come unto me' (Prov 9.4). I drew near to God, rightly suspecting that I had found what I sought; and I enquired further still in order to discover His intentions for this perfectly little one; and then I found the saying, "As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you; on my breasts I shall carry you and upon my knees I shall caress you" (Isaiah 66.12-13). From what we have just said it is clear that the Scriptures contain special sayings appropriate to each mission and are, so to speak, waiting to be discovered and interpreted by that particular mission.

In a special study entitled "Thérèse, a lover of the Scriptures", a Belgian Benedictine has gathered together all of Thérèse's scriptural quotations and set them in their context; according to the index in the 1947 edition of her works, we encounter 117 quotations from the Old Testament, and 250 quotations from the New Testament. This means that she quoted the Scriptures 367 times.(4) If this number seems to be large, then let me make it clear that the 367 times do not include the quotes from Scripture that she quoted in her letters which the number of letters alone amount to 268, excluding the nearly 70 letters that were lost, e.g. 15 letters to Fr. Pichon. Why am I mentioning these figures? So that we may have a slight idea of how much Thérèse was in love with the word of God, the word that possessed her heart. Indeed, as Jesus told us: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Thérèse's words and writings are a projector of what she treasured in her heart. Were we to analyse the Spiritual Doctrine of St. Thérèse, we will discover that her doctrine has two dimensions: Vertical and horizontal. The Vertical dimension can be entitled: Thérèse and Jesus; the horizontal dimension can be subdivided into six directions:

1. Thérèse and the Church
2. Thérèse and Priests
3. Thérèse and neighbour

4. Thérèse and Her Little Way

5. Thérèse and Suffering

6. Thérèse and Prayer.

Let us for a while evaluate the Vertical dimension, i.e. Thérèse and Jesus: From the writings of Thérèse it is clear enough that there was an intimate and personal relationship between Thérèse and Jesus. It can rightly be said that she found her fulfilment in her total dedication to Jesus alone. It is the case of her vocation and apostolate; the 'raison d'être' of her life. She said explicitly: "I want to go to Carmel not for Pauline's sake but for Jesus alone." "I did not cease reporting to Jesus that it was for Him alone I wished to be a Carmelite."

In all her writings Thérèse uses only the name "Jesus". Listen to this: The name "Jesus" in the writings of Thérèse appears 1493 times:

In Autobiography - 353 times

In Letters - 875 times

In the Poems - 245 times

In Last Conversations - 20 times

The only 4 times that she used the title Christ are twice in the Autobiography and twice in the Letters. The two references in the Autobiography are:

"... it was necessary that the Christ suffer and that He enter through it into His glory (Luke 24.26). It is a quotation she cites while explaining the audience with the Pope. The other reference is when she speaks of a wooden Cross of black wood without the image of Christ on it.

The only two references we find the title "Christ" in her Letters are: Writing to Abbe Belliere: "... it (martyrdom) is worthy of an Apostle of Christ (dated December 26, 1896) and the second reference we encounter it in her letter to Abbe Roulland: "Persecution has changed in form, the Apostles of Christ have not changed ..."

The meaning which Thérèse gives to the name "Jesus" according to Abbe Combes is to deal with Him in a deep degree of intimacy. It is to name the One Whom we love. It is to cling to the One with a living faith and fervent love. It is the one with whom we cherish our most personal and the most profound relationship. Finally, it is He who is, in the fullest sense, the "Beloved". It is the one to whom we promise our love, to whom we confide our secrets. It is to agree with all the mystics who sang: "O Jesu dulcis memoria". For Thérèse the word "Christ" is rather impersonal, abstract and external. It is to look at the Second Person of the Trinity as a historian will look at him. It does not involve the affective, intimate element. In other words, "Christ" is in the conceptual level whereas "Jesus" is more intimate in the affective and intimate level.

In the analysis of Thérèse's doctrine we encounter a very genuine invitation 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 him 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.

(Back to the Gospel - A letter from the O'Carroll and O.C.D. Superiors General on the occasion of the centenary of the death of St. Thérèse of Lisieux #11).

I would like to expand on Thérèse's idea of the Blessed Virgin.

## THÉRÈSE'S IDEA OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(Our Lady of the Smile)

The title of Our Lady preferred by Thérèse, her model of holiness, was that of the Virgin of Nazareth, whose simple and sublime life was spent so quietly in the midst of daily occupations, like that of the other women of Galilee

"How lovely it will be to learn in Heaven all that happened in the home of the Holy Family! It seems to me that their life must have been very simple. Her countrymen came and spoke familiarly with the Blessed Virgin. It does me good, when I think of the Holy Family, to imagine that they lived a very ordinary life. Not at all the kind one is often told about or would suppose! For example, that the Child Jesus, after having frozen birds into stones, blew upon them and gave them back their life. No, little Jesus did not perform any useless miracles. If He did, why were they not all transported to Egypt in a miraculous way, which would have been much more natural and so easy for God? In the twinkling of an eye they would have been taken down there! No, it was not that way: everything in their life was done as it is in ours". (Last Confidences Aug 20, 1897)

"I know that at Nazareth, Virgin full of graces,  
Thou didst live in poverty, wishing for nothing more.  
No raptures, no miracles, no ecstasies,  
Adorned thy life, O Queen of the elect!  
The number of 'little ones' is vast on the earth.  
They can without trembling lift their eyes to thee.  
By the common way, incomparable Mother,  
Thou art pleased to lead them to eternity."

(From the Poem: "Why I love thee O Mary")

What charmed Thérèse in contemplating the Mystery of Mary was to see the Mother of God pass unnoticed among the anonymous crowds of the other women of the country. "How I should like to have been a priest to preach about the Blessed Virgin Mary! I think that just one sermon would have been enough to make my ideas on this subject clearly understood. First I would have shown how extremely little is known of the life of the Blessed Virgin. One ought not to say unlikely things about her or such as are not known for certain, for example, that at the age of three, when she was very small, she went to the temple to offer herself to God with extraordinary fervour and burning sentiments of love, when instead, perhaps, she went there quite simply out of obedience to her parents.

For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to bear fruit, it must show her real life, as the Gospels let us see it, and not an imaginary one. It is easy to see that her real life, at Nazareth and later, must have been quite ordinary. "He was subject to them." How simple that is! Sometimes the Virgin Mary is described as unapproachable. It would be better to show how she can be imitated, by practicing hidden virtues, and to say that she lived by faith as we do, giving proofs drawn from the Gospels, where we read: "They did not understand what she said to them", or again: "His father and mother were in admiration of the things which they said about him." Does it not seem to you, Mother, that this "admiration" denotes a certain astonishment? (Last Confidences Aug 18, 1897) Thérèse loved to contemplate the humble Virgin Mary as a model accessible to the multitude of 'little souls' who go towards God 'by the common way', that is to say, by means of a life of "perfect love", under the most ordinary appearances.

In her "Last Confidences Aug 23, 1897," Thérèse speaks clearly about her ideas on the Blessed Virgin: Last Conversations.

Having made this short reflection on Thérèse's views of Our lady, we are now in a position to continue to reflect on how Thérèse actualized the Gospel in her life. It can rightly be said with complete confidence that

Thérèse 's incomparable contribution to the twentieth century spirituality is a return to the Gospel in its purest form. In her religious name -Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face - our sister summarized 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 relationship and gives a new dimension to our relationships with God, with others and with all things. (#10 Letter of Fr. General). In her Last Conversations, 17/7/1897, Thérèse said these precious words: "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."

Yes, all Christians, especially those in consecrated life, are called to give prophetic witness by proclaiming the gospel values and denouncing all that is opposed to them. Indeed, any commitment to evangelization 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 co-operate with Christ in the redemption of the world - not only until the end of her life, but until the end of time.

A talk with such a topic as I have chosen: "Thérèse, a living witness of the Gospel", cannot be complete if I do not make a reference to St. Paul's life and teachings with Thérèse's life and teachings.

St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says: "I who am less than the least of all the Saints, have been entrusted with this special grace, not only of proclaiming to the pagans the infinite treasure of Christ but also of explaining how the mystery is to be dispensed. Through all the ages, this has been kept hidden." (Eph 3.8). While keeping in mind these words of Paul one ought not to lose sight of the fact that St. Thérèse does not hesitate to explain in Ms A 49 R that her science is due to her littleness. She wrote: "Because I was little and weak he bent down to me, he taught me about his love in secret." When we compare these words of Thérèse with those of Paul we are bound to discover that there are two points in common. First, it is through a revelation of Jesus Christ that Paul has knowledge of the mystery. Just the same with Thérèse: Jesus instructed her in secret. Second, as a consequence of these instructions from the Lord, she acquired an astonishing knowledge, as she indicates in what follows: "Ah, if the learned of the world, who had passed their life in study had come to interrogate me, no doubt they would have been surprised that a child of fourteen was able to understand the secrets of perfections, secrets that they were unable to discover with all their science, because in order to possess them it is necessary to be poor in spirit."

Quote Oscar Wilde "In the soul of one who is ignorant there is always room for a great idea." There is no doubt that the "way of spiritual childhood", as taught by Thérèse, is in conformity with the teaching of St. Paul and finds its foundation in the second letter to the Corinthians, even if Thérèse only made one explicit reference to it.

The two poles which define her little way" the best, are poverty and confidence. Her sister, Marie of the Sacred Heart, was mistaken in identifying the immensity of her desires with perfection. St. Thérèse re-establishes the

truth in writing to her (Letter 197): "Ah! I well know that it is not that at all which pleases God in my little soul. What pleases him is to see that I love my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in his merciful love..."

"Poverty" and "Hope", that is what pleases God in Thérèse's soul. These are the two poles of "spiritual childhood", poverty engendering hope. What is more, the reality of this relationship is remarkably expressed by St. Paul in chapter 12 v. 9 of the 2 Corinthians, I quote: "So I shall be very happy to make my weakness my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me." Yes, in our analysis of the Scriptures it is amazing to discover "that the accepted and loved weakness attracts strength. In a letter to Marie Guerin, Thérèse explicitly refers to this text from Paul; she writes: "You are wrong ... if you think that your little Thérèse always ardently follows the path of virtue: she is weak, really weak, and every day she has a new experience of it, but Marie, Jesus is pleased to teach her, like he taught Saint Paul, the science of glorifying oneself in one's infirmities. That is a grace and I pray that Jesus will teach it to you, for therein alone lies peace and peace of heart". Even if it is not St. Paul that revealed the way of spiritual childhood to Thérèse, he did give her a confirmation of the value of what she called her "Little Way". Note that it is Jesus, she writes, who is pleased to teach her this paradoxical science, like he taught St. Paul. Here we touch on a topic of the greatest importance, the true spiritual master of Thérèse is Jesus. Has she not confirmed this? Yes, indeed, and more than once. For example, in Ms A (83v) she writes: Jesus has no need of books nor doctors to instruct souls; He the Doctor of Doctors, instructs without the sound of words ... I have never heard him speak". Is it possible to speak of revelation in the case of Thérèse? Did this not end with the death of the last apostle? Revelation in its strictest sense, certainly; but Jesus declared: "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and recall to your mind all that I have said". (Jn 14.26) This text does not concern a new teaching, but a reminder of the teaching of Jesus who said: "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you to complete truth." (Jn 16.13).

Here we ask: Of what does this "complete truth" consist? It is that which the Holy Spirit reminds us of inwardly, by means of revelation as Saint Paul has described in the Letter to the Ephesians: "May the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to a full knowledge of him." (Ep. 1.17). How does one acquire this true knowledge? It is a mystery and the secret of the Wisdom of Love, but it is particularly the fruit of mental prayer and contemplation: "a simple look on the truth" which penetrates into the "gold of the substance". It is in this way that St. Thérèse has given us her way of spiritual childhood, which is only new because it had been forgotten.

That mental prayer is the mode of knowledge foreseen by Thérèse is made clear at the end of her autobiography (MSe 36r) she writes: "For it is not indeed from mental prayer that Saints Paul, Augustine, John of the Cross, Thomas Aquinas, Francis, Dominic and so many other illustrious Friends of God drew this Divine science which ravishes the greatest minds?"

To what extent can it be said that Thérèse was a contemplative? To answer this question we have first to give a definition of contemplation. St. Thomas Aquinas defined Contemplation as: "A simple glance at God" Now, Thérèse, in MsB of her autobiography writes: "For as long as you wish, my Dearly Beloved, your little bird will stay without strength or wings, but always with its eyes fixed on you". This, my brothers and sisters is one of the great lessons that Thérèse communicates to us, children of the speed age: to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and not to lose sight of him, even when it seems that darkness is our only companion. Yes, to see him in

our daily events and occupations is to be able to bear witness to the Gospel. Allow me once more to quote Thérèse for the last time: Listen to Thérèse once more: "He the Doctor of Doctors instructs without the sound of words ... I have never heard him speak, but I feel that he is within me at every moment. He guides me and inspires me as to what I should say or do; I discover just at the moment of need the light that I had not yet seen. It is not during my mental prayer that it is the most abundant, but rather in the middle of my daily occupations (Ms A. 83v). If we, like Thérèse, hold fast to the Gospel, and continue to fall in love with the Word of God, there will come a time when through our daily occupations The Sacred texts will jump at us and shine with a new light ... a light that directs our feet along the road of the Love of God and the Love of our neighbour.

At the head of her bed, Sr. Genevieve of the Holy Face, her dear Celine, the sister of her soul, asked for a word of farewell. "I have said it all", murmured Thérèse in a faithful echo of the great words of Jesus, "all is finished; it is love alone that matters".