



TERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025

**Reading the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025
2024: Manuscripts B and C**



Text 1:
My vocation is Love
(Ms. B, 2v-3v)

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Suggestion for the community meeting:

1. Read the text together
2. One of those present, having prepared a contribution in advance, discusses the text using the commentary (and other aids, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be helpful to have made individual readings and reflections on Therese's text before the community meeting.

Preliminary remark: in order to facilitate the reading of the proposed text, we invite you to first read the letter from her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (LC 169), and the beginning of Therese's reply (LT 196). The dialogue proposed concerns folios 2v-3v.

From Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart to Therese (LC 169)

Jesus!

Sunday, 13th September

Dear little Sister,

I am writing not because I have something to tell you but to get something from you, from you who are so close to God, from you who are His little privileged spouse to whom He confides His secrets... The secrets of Jesus to Therese are sweet, and I would like to hear about them once again. Write me a short note. This is perhaps your last retreat, for the golden cluster of Jesus must make Him desirous of gathering it. Little Therese must be tempting to those up above, Jesus and Mary, Papa and Mamma, and the four little angels, and all the saints of heaven, and all the angels whom she has taken as her relatives. Ask Jesus to love me, too, as He does his little Therese. Ah! the little Therese, she has grown up, grown up, and still she is always the little one, she is always the Benjamin, she is always the darling whom Jesus (just as in the past, her dear little father) holds by the hand. As for herself, she still goes on, as in days gone by, gazing on the stars of heaven and closing her eyes to all things here below. But her heavenly Spouse does not mislead her, anymore than did her father... He does not lead her toward precipices, He does not let her fall. Far from it!... He rocks her gently on His Heart, He smiles at her abandonment, and He gathers for her thousands and thousands of treasures... Is He not her entire fortune? So little Therese is disturbed about nothing but loving her Jesus. Ah! I ask her to pray very much for her little god-mother who loves her so much, so that she, too, closing her eyes on all things of the earth, may no longer dream of anything but

of looking up above, of working for heaven, of exercising herself in the art of loving. That is the precious pearl that little Therese possesses. Little godmother would really like to enjoy this treasure with her.

Marie of the Sacred Heart
r. c. ind.

Our mother permits you to answer me by return mail.

From Therese to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (LT 196)

13th (?) September 1896 (LT 196)

J.M.J.T.

Jesus

Oh, dear Sister! You ask me to give you a souvenir of my retreat, a retreat that perhaps will be the last... Since our Mother permits it, it is a joy for me to come to speak with you, who are my Sister twice over, with you who lent me your voice, promising in my name that I wanted to serve Jesus alone when it was not possible for me to speak... Dear little Godmother, the child whom you offered to the Lord is the one who speaks to you this evening, she is the one who loves you as a child can love its Mother... Only in heaven will you know all the gratitude that overflows my heart... Oh, dear Sister, you would like to hear the secrets Jesus confides to your little daughter ; these secrets He confides to you, I know, for you are the one who taught me to gather the divine teachings. However, I am going to try to stammer some words, although I feel that it is impossible for human words to repeat things that the human heart can hardly sense.

Do not believe that I am swimming in consolations; oh, no! My consolation is to have none on earth. Without showing Himself, without making His voice heard, Jesus teaches me in secret. It is not by means of books, for I do not understand what I am reading, but at times a word like this one that I drew out at the end of prayer (after having remained in silence and aridity) comes to console me : ‘Here is the Master I am giving you ; he will teach you all you must do. I want to have you read in the book of life wherein is contained the science of Love.’ The science of Love, oh! Yes, this word resounds sweetly in the ear of my soul. I desire only this science. Having given all my riches for it, I look upon this as having given nothing, just as the spouse in the sacred canticles... I understand so well that it is only love that can make us pleasing to God that this love is the only good that I ambition. Jesus is pleased to show me the only road which leads to this divine furnace, and this road is the *abandonment* of the little child who sleeps without fear in his Father’s arms... ‘Whoever is a *little one*, let him come to me’, said the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Solomon, and this same Spirit of Love has said again: ‘Mercy is granted to *little ones*.’ In His name, the Prophet Isaiah reveals to us that on the last day : ‘The Lord will lead his flock into pastures, he will gather together the *little lambs* and will press them to his bosom,’ and as though all these promises were not enough, the same Prophet, whose inspired glance was already plunged into the eternal depths, cried out in the Lord’s name : ‘As a mother caresses her child, so will I comfort you ; I will carry you on my bosom, and I shall rock you on my knees.’

Oh, dear Godmother, after language like this, there is nothing to do but be silent and weep with gratitude and love... Ah! If all weak and imperfect souls felt what the littlest of all souls feels, the soul of your little Therese, not one would despair of reaching the

summit of the mountain of love, since Jesus does not ask for great actions, but only abandonment and gratitude, since He has said in Psalm XLIX : I have no need of the he-goats from your flocks, for all the beasts of the forest belong to me, and the thousands of animals that graze on the hills ; I know all the birds of the mountains . . . If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the earth and all it contains are mine. Must I eat the flesh of bulls and drink the blood of goats?’

‘*Offer to God sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.*’ See, then, all that Jesus is asking from us. He has no need of our works but only of our *love*, for this same God, who declares He has no need to tell us if He is hungry, did not hesitate *to beg* for a little water from the Samaritan woman. He was thirsty... But when He said: ‘Give me to drink,’ it was the *love* of His poor creatures that the Creator of the universe was asking for. He was thirsty for love... Ah! I feel it more than ever. Jesus is parched; He meets only with the ungrateful and indifferent among the disciples of the world and among His *own disciples* He finds, alas! few hearts that give themselves to Him without any reservations, that understand all the tenderness of His infinite love. Dear Sister, how blessed we are to understand the intimate secrets of our Spouse. Ah! If you were willing to write all that you know about them, we would have beautiful pages to read, but I know that you prefer to keep in the bottom of your heart ‘the secrets of the King’. You say to me: ‘It is honourable to publish the works of the Most High.’ I find you are right in keeping silence, and it is only in order to please you that I write these lines, for I feel my powerlessness in repeating in earthly words the secrets of heaven. And, then, after having written out pages and pages, I would find that I had still not begun... There are so many different horizons, so many infinitely varied nuances, that the palette of the heavenly Painter alone will be able, after the

night of this life, to furnish me with colours capable of painting the marvels that He reveals to the eyes of my soul.

Dear Sister, you have asked me to write to you about my dreams and ‘my little doctrine’, as you call it... I have done this in the following pages, but so poorly that it seems to me impossible for you to understand. Perhaps you are going to find my expressions exaggerated... Ah! Pardon me, this must be laid to my unpleasant style; I assure you that there is no exaggeration in my *little soul*, that all is calm and at rest there...

When writing, I am speaking to Jesus; it is easier for me to express my thoughts... which, alas, does not prevent their being poorly expressed!

MANUSCRIPT B, 2V-3V

Seeing myself so tenderly loved, I dared to pronounce these words: "O Mother! I beg you, tell me whether God will leave me for a long time on earth. Will He come soon to get me?" Smiling tenderly, the saint whispered: "*Yes, soon, soon, I promise you.*" I added: "Mother, tell me further if God is not asking something [2v^o] more of me than my poor little actions and desires. Is He content with me?" The saint's face took on an expression *incomparably more tender* than the first time she spoke to me. Her look and her caresses were the sweetest of answers. However, she said to me: "God asks no other thing from you. He is content, very content!" After again embracing me with more love than the tenderest of mothers has ever given to her child, I saw her leave. My heart was filled with joy, and then I remembered my Sisters, and I wanted to ask her some favors for them, but alas, I awoke!

O Jesus, the storm was no longer raging, heaven was calm and serene. I *believed*, I *felt* there was a *heaven* and that this heaven is peopled with souls who actually love me, who consider me their child. This impression remains in my heart, and this all the more because I was, up until then, *absolutely indifferent to Venerable Mother Anne of Jesus*. I never invoked her in prayer and the thought of her never came to my mind except when I heard others speak of her, which was seldom. And when I understood to what a degree *she loved me*, how *indifferent* I had been toward her, my heart was filled with love and gratitude, not only for the Saint who had visited me but for all the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

O my Beloved! this grace was only the prelude to the greatest graces You wished to bestow upon me. Allow me, my only Love, to recall them to You today, *today* which is the sixth anniversary of *our union*. Ah! my Jesus, pardon me if I am

unreasonable in wishing to express my desires and longings which reach even unto infinity. Pardon me and heal my soul by giving her what she longs for so much!

To be Your *Spouse*, to be a *Carmelite*, and by my union with You to be the *Mother* of souls, should not this suffice me? And yet it is not so. No doubt, these three privileges sum up my true *vocation*: *Carmelite*, *Spouse*, *Mother*, and yet I feel within me other *vocations*. I feel the *vocation* of the WARRIOR, THE PRIEST, THE APOSTLE, THE DOCTOR, THE MARTYR. Finally, I feel the need and the desire of carrying out the most heroic deeds for *You, O Jesus*. I feel within my soul the courage of the *Crusader*, the *Papal Guard*, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church.

I feel in me the *vocation* of the PRIEST. With what love, O Jesus, I would carry You in my hands when, at my voice, You would come down from heaven. And with what love would I give You to souls! But alas! while desiring to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi and I feel the *vocation* of imitating him in refusing the sublime dignity of the *Priesthood*.

O Jesus, my Love, my Life, how can I combine these contrasts? [3r°] How can I realize the desires of my poor *little soul*?

Ah! in spite of my littleness, I would like to enlighten souls as did the *Prophets* and the *Doctors*. I have the *vocation of the Apostle*. I would like to travel over the whole earth to preach Your Name and to plant Your glorious Cross on infidel soil. But *O my Beloved*, one mission alone would not be sufficient for me, I would want to preach the Gospel on all the five continents simultaneously and even to the most remote isles. I would be a missionary, not for a few years only but from the beginning of creation until the consummation of the ages. But above all, O my Beloved Savior, I would shed my blood for You even to the very last drop.

Martyrdom was the dream of my youth and this dream has grown with me within Carmel's cloisters. But here again, I feel that my dream is a folly, for I cannot confine myself to desiring *one kind* of martyrdom. To satisfy me I need *all*. Like You, my Adorable Spouse, I would be scourged and crucified. I would die played like St. Bartholomew. I would be plunged into boiling oil like St. John; I would undergo all the tortures inflicted upon the martyrs. With St. Agnes and St. Cecilia, I would present my neck to the sword, and like Joan of Arc, my dear sister, I would whisper at the stake Your Name, O JESUS. When thinking of the torments which will be the lot of Christians at the time of Anti-Christ, I feel my heart leap with joy and I would that these torments be reserved for me. Jesus, Jesus, if I wanted to write all my desires, I would have to borrow Your *Book of Life*, for in it are reported all the actions of all the saints, and I would accomplish all of them for You.

O my Jesus! what is your answer to all my follies? Is there a soul more *little*, more powerless than mine? Nevertheless even because of my weakness, it has pleased You, O Lord, to grant my *little childish desires* and You desire, today, to grant other desires that are *greater* than the universe.

During my meditation, my desires caused me a veritable martyrdom, and I opened the Epistles of St. Paul to find some kind of answer. Chapters 12 and 13 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians fell under my eyes. I read there, in the first of these chapters, that *all* cannot be apostles, prophets, doctors, etc., that the Church is composed of different members, and that the eye cannot be the hand at *one and the same time*. The answer was clear, but it did not fulfill my desires and gave me no peace. But just as Mary Magdalene found what she was seeking by always stooping down [3v°] and looking into the empty tomb, so I, abasing myself to the very depths of my nothingness, raised myself so high that I was able to attain my end. Without becoming discouraged, I continued my reading, and

this sentence consoled me: *"Yet strive after THE BETTER GIFTS, and I point out to you a yet more excellent way."* And the Apostle explains how all the most PERFECT gifts are nothing without LOVE. That Charity is the EXCELLENT WAY that leads most surely to God.

I finally had rest. Considering the mystical body of the Church, I had not recognized myself in any of the members described by St. Paul, or rather I desired to see myself in them *all*. Charity gave me the key to my *vocation*. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church *had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE*. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES.... IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!

Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love.... 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 thus my dream will be realized.

Why speak of a delirious joy? No, this expression is not exact, for it was rather the calm and serene peace of the navigator perceiving the beacon which must lead him to the port.... O luminous Beacon of love, I know how to reach You, I have found the secret of possessing Your flame.

I am only a child, powerless and weak, and yet it is my weakness that gives me the boldness of offering myself as *VIC-TIM of Your Love, O Jesus!* In times past, victims, pure and spot-

less, were the only ones accepted by the Strong and Powerful God. To satisfy Divine Justice, perfect victims were necessary, but the *law of Love* has succeeded to the law of fear, and *Love* has chosen me as a holocaust, me, a weak and imperfect creature. Is not this choice worthy of *Love*? Yes, in order that

Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower Itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into *fire*.

Introduction to the text:

As we start again this year, the texts are admittedly a bit long, because they include the preliminary reading of the two letters that we are suggesting as an introduction, to provide a basis for understanding the meaning of the selected passage. (LC 169 and LT 196). The discussion will focus on Manuscript B, but it is worth taking the time to read these two letters.

Her vocation as a Carmelite ‘was not enough for her’, she needed a response from God: Therese searched for it in the Scriptures. She dreamed of responding to all vocations, everywhere and in all times, and in their most heroic forms. It was with the Apostle Paul that she found the reply, when he declared that Love comprises all vocations.

‘My only love’ (Ms. B, 2v): this is what Therese was to carve like graffiti on the lintel of the door of her cell: ‘Jesus is my only Love’.

‘The courage of a Crusader, of a Papal Guard’¹ (Ms. B, 2v): Therese, like her sister Celine, always had the quality of a warrior and a knight. She was quick to use military vocabulary. Thus, in Poem 36, she had no hesitation in saying: ‘And in the field of my apostolate/ Like a warrior, I hurl myself into combat!’

‘Missionary’ (Ms. B, 3r): one vocation that she carried out to the full, because she was proclaimed patron of missions and missionaries by Pope Pius XI on 14th December 1927.

‘Martyrdom’ (Ms. B, 3r): among all the vocations that Therese sensed in herself, martyrdom was the dominant one. She rediscovered the martyrs during her pilgrimage to Italy, and her favourite martyr was Saint Joan of Arc, around whom she wrote two plays, RP1 and RP3).

‘To offer myself as a Victim for your Love’ (Ms. B, 3v), Therese returns here to her Act of Offering to Merciful Love, which she had made on 9th June 1895. However, here she lays more emphasis on weakness, childhood and smallness.

‘May He convert this fire into nothingness’ (Ms. B, 3v) : apart from one mention in Manuscript A (81v), the word ‘nothingness’ only appears with Therese in connection with the trial of faith.

1 The battalion of Papal Zouaves, created on 1st January 1861, was modelled on the Zouave troops of the French Army whose exotic uniform was very popular in the mid-19th century, and became a regiment on 1st January 1867; it was constituted of volunteers, mainly French, Belgian and Dutch, going to defend the Papal State, whose existence was threatened by Italian unification.

For the community dialogue:

1. *What is the text saying?* Understanding the content and initial meaning of Therese's text
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Discern the present-day relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual. . .) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me/us?* Consider the personal and community relevance of the text.

The purpose of this process is to allow Therese to speak to us herself, to question and encourage us, and to open us up to her clarifying and confirming our own personal and community path. The questions suggested are only indicative, and could perhaps be used in individual meditation and community sharing.

Questions:

1. What is the essential question that Therese puts to herself when she is confronted with the trial of her faith? Is this a question which dwells in us? When does it return during the course of our lives?
2. What is my essential vocation? When and how does it express itself most insistently? What concrete place does the Church have in our Carmelite vocation?
3. What is it that allows Therese to declare that her vocation of Love is definitely authentic and that it is a gift of God?



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