

WORD ON FIRE

CLASSICS

Story of a Soul

The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
by JOHN CLARKE, O.C.D.

FOREWORD by BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

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FOREWORD

by Bishop Robert Barron



Outside the little French town of Lisieux, there stands an enormous and elaborately decorated basilica dedicated to a very simple woman who is also one of the most extraordinary saints of the Church. Thérèse was a cloistered Carmelite nun who died at the age of twenty-four and who at her death was known only to her family and her fellow sisters in the convent. One of her sisters, in fact, wondered what they could possibly write about her in the obituary that would circulate among the other French Carmelites. Yet within a few years of her death, Thérèse had a worldwide reputation, and within decades of her passing, she was declared a saint and eventually a Doctor of the Church. How do we begin to explain this? We have to start with the book you hold in your hands: her spiritual autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, which Thérèse wrote at the prompting of her superior in the last years of her life.

I will confess that when I first read *Story of a Soul*, I was not particularly impressed. Like many others, I found it overly sentimental, and as a post-Freudian, I was only too willing to see in its girlish spiritual enthusiasms evidence of neuroses and repressions. But then I noticed that a number of great intellectuals loved Thérèse. Among her cultivated admirers were Dorothy Day, Edith Stein, Thomas Merton, John Paul II, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. When I was a doctoral student in Paris, I attended a seminar conducted by my thesis director, Fr. Michel Corbin, a brilliant Jesuit specialist in medieval thought. Corbin commented that the French do not refer to Thérèse of Lisieux as “the Little Flower,” as Anglophones do, but rather as *la petite Thérèse* (the little

Thérèse), in order to distinguish her from *la grande Thérèse* (the great Thérèse—that is, Teresa of Avila). But then he added, “After many years of reading both saints, I realize that Thérèse of Lisieux is really *la grande Thérèse*.” I knew then that I had to take a second look.

Thérèse was born on January 2, 1873, the youngest child of Louis and Zélie Martin, two extremely devout members of the French middle class. By her own admission, Thérèse’s early childhood was arcadian. A beautiful girl, she was doted on by everyone, especially her father. He was her *petit roi* (little king) and she was his *petite reine* (little queen). She entered happily into the intensely religious rhythms and practices of the Martin household, and from a very early age, she had the intuition that she would enter the Carmelite convent and become a nun. The idyll of her childhood came to an abrupt end with the death of her mother in 1877, when Thérèse was only four. In the wake of this trauma, the little Thérèse became moody and withdrawn, “sensitive to an excessive degree.” The full effect of her mother’s death on Thérèse would become clear when Pauline, her older sister and substitute mother, decided to enter religious life. After Pauline disappeared behind the walls of the convent, Thérèse experienced a strange malady, with both physical and psychological symptoms, some of them frightening. Here is Thérèse’s own simple description of this awful period: “I was absolutely terrified by everything.” She came, in time, to see this period of her life as a testing and a purging. What was being purged, she concluded, were precisely her narcissism and her fussy self-absorption.

What finally saved her from this suffering was a manifestation of grace. On May 13, 1883, Thérèse was bedridden, utterly debilitated physically and psychologically. She noticed a statue of the Blessed Mother, which had recently been placed in her room. She was struck by the ravishing beauty of Mary, especially by the Virgin’s smile. Somehow, as she registered that smile and allowed it to permeate her being, all of her physical and psychological symptoms left her, and she was healed. How does one explain this extraordinary incident? I suppose it could be examined under any number of rubrics, but what matters is

that Thérèse appreciated it as a manifestation of God's grace—which is to say, God's unmerited love. Without any prompting from us, not as a reward for our efforts, even while we are helpless, God breaks into our hearts and changes us. After she had come of age, Thérèse emerged as one of the great “doctors of grace” in the Catholic tradition, once comparing herself to a little child who, knowing her deep incapacity to please the Lord by her own exertions, stands before him and simply lifts up her arms, hoping to be raised up.

The next major step in Thérèse's spiritual journey was, again, a small, private affair, nothing to which a conventional biographer would think of drawing attention. It took place on Christmas Day 1886. There was a custom in the Martin household that just after Midnight Mass, on Christmas morning, the children would draw from their shoes little gifts that their father had placed in them. Thérèse loved this ritual and was especially delighted by her father's active participation in it. But on this particular Christmas morning, just before the commencement of the ritual, Thérèse went upstairs to fetch something, and when she was presumably thought to be out of earshot, her father said, “Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!” Normally, such a comment coming from her father would have broken Thérèse's heart, but something quietly miraculous happened: Thérèse calmly decided not to take offense and to respond in love. Suppressing her feelings of disappointment, she calmly descended the stairs and, with unfeigned sincerity and enthusiasm, entered into the family ritual. Certainly a simple scene, but when read through spiritual eyes, it was momentous precisely because it represented the breakthrough of God's love into Thérèse's heart—suddenly, unbidden, changing her in an instant.

In the wake of this Christmas conversion, Thérèse resolved with renewed intensity to enter Carmel. Her early desire to be a religious now became a burning conviction. For nine years, until her death at twenty-four, she never left the confines of that simple place and lived the austere life of a Carmelite religious. In the course of those years, she cultivated a spiritual path that she came to call “the little way.” It was

not the path of her great Carmelite forebears Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, not the method suited for spiritual athletes, but a way that any simple believer could follow. It had a good deal to do with spiritual childhood, becoming little in the presence of God the Father: dependent, hopeful, waiting to receive gifts. It also involved a willingness to do simple and ordinary things out of great love: little acts of kindness, small sacrifices graciously accepted, putting up with annoying people. One of the most entertaining and spiritually illuminating sections of *Story of a Soul* is Thérèse's account of her infinitely patient dealings with a cranky old nun to whom she had been assigned as a helper. Every kindness of Thérèse was met with correction and signs of displeasure on the part of the old lady, but still the younger nun persisted in love. "O Jesus, my Love," Thérèse writes in another pivotal entry. "My *vocation*, at last I have found it. . . . MY VOCATION IS LOVE! . . . In the heart of the Church . . . I shall be *Love*." That is the little way, which continues to beguile millions around the world.

As I said, like many others, I first reacted negatively to the overly emotional, sentimental style of Thérèse of Lisieux, but even the most skeptical readers are usually won over by the account of her terrible struggle with unbelief at the very end of her life. This intense spiritual suffering coincided almost exactly with the onset of the tuberculosis that would eventually take her life. What began to plague Thérèse were terrible doubts concerning the existence of heaven. Like Hamlet, she began to wonder whether anything followed "the sleep of death." And this was no passing bout of intellectual scrupulosity; it lasted up until the moment of her death. What is especially interesting is that Thérèse interpreted this struggle not as dumb suffering but as a participation in the pain experienced by many of her contemporaries who did not believe in God: "During those very joyful days of the Easter season, Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith. . . . He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness."

Before she died at age twenty-four on September 30, 1897, Thérèse remarked, "I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth." Her

intercessory power has been manifested in the lives of many, including my own. The Little Flower has been a personal friend for a long time, and we adopted her very early as the patroness of Word on Fire. Whenever we found ourselves in a difficult situation—with money, delays, permissions, practical problems—we would call upon her, and a staggering number of times, solutions would more or less present themselves. In time, every member of our team would start to notice these “Little Flower moments.” We dedicated the *CATHOLICISM* film series to her, and we launched the Word on Fire Institute on her feast day. We continue to rely on her heavenly help to this day.

As you read this classic of the Catholic spiritual tradition—whether for the first time or the hundredth—may you be opened to the great love of the little way, and seek the intercession of the Little Flower, *la grande Thérèse*.

Je chanterai éternellement les Miséricordes du Seigneur !...



Jours de Grâces, accordés par le Seigneur à sa petite épouse

Naissance 2 Janvier 1873 — Baptême 4 Janvier 1873 — Soudre de la Sainte Vierge Mai 1883
 Première Communion 8 Mai 1884 — Confirmation 14 Juin 1884 — Conversion 25
 Décembre 1886 — Audience de Léon XIII 20 Novembre 1887 — Entrée au Carmel 2 Avril 1888
 Prise d'habit 10 Janvier 1889 — Notre grande richesse 12 Février 1889 — Examen canonique
 Bénédiction de Léon XIII Septembre 1890 — Profession 8 Septembre 1890 — Prise de voile 24
 Septembre 1890 — Offrande de moi-même à l'Amour 9 Juin 1895.

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The coat of arms Thérèse designed and placed at the end of Manuscript A.
 See Thérèse's Explanation of Her Coat of Arms on page 283.

INTRODUCTION

by John Clarke, O.C.D.



“I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make God loved as I love Him, to teach souls my little way.”

These words were spoken by St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus on July 17, 1897, a few months before her death on September 30, 1897. When her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, asked her, “And what is this little way you want to teach to souls?” Thérèse answered: “It is the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute surrender.”

“After my death, you must not speak to anyone about my manuscript before it is published; you must speak only to Mother Prioress about it. If you act otherwise, the devil will lay more than one trap to hinder God’s work, a very important work!”

She said this to Mother Agnes on August 1, 1897. There is a sense of urgency in the statement, a kind of “hurry up” or things just won’t get done.

What Thérèse was talking about and what she was closely associating with her “mission” and her “little way” was the publication of her writings. These contained her teaching as she had actually lived it out in her own human experience. We come across certain specific explanations of this “little way” in several places in her manuscripts, but the entire book is a lesson in how to live this “way of trust and absolute surrender.” The book that you now hold in your hands contains this lesson.

This book may be looked on, then, as St. Thérèse's legacy to the world, her personal message to "little ones." We know that her words during her last illness about a "mission" and a "little way" were not just the wanderings of a sick mind. Two popes solemnly endorsed these words within twenty-five years after her death, and both these popes tried their best during the process of her beatification and canonization to bring her teachings to the attention of the faithful and to urge their practice.

"In spiritual childhood is the secret of sanctity for all the faithful of the Catholic world," stated Benedict XV in his allocution on the heroicity of Sister Thérèse's practice of virtue, August 14, 1921. He continued: "There is a call to all the faithful of every nation, no matter what their age, sex, or state of life, to enter wholeheartedly into the Little Way which led Sister Thérèse to the summit of heroic virtue. It is our desire that the secret of sanctity of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus be revealed to all our children." And his successor, Pope Pius XI, on April 29, 1923, stated: "We earnestly desire that all the faithful should study her in order to copy her, becoming children themselves; since otherwise they cannot, according to the words of the Master, arrive at the kingdom of heaven."

We find the pope making reference here to the words of Jesus regarding this teaching on spiritual childhood. These words we recall from several places in the Gospels: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). "Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). And elsewhere: "Allow the little ones to come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 10:14). "Amen, I say to you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall never enter into it" (Mark 10:15).

Although St. Thérèse was well acquainted with these familiar quotations from the New Testament because she meditated upon the Gospels frequently, it is interesting to note that when she teaches her

“little way” explicitly, she uses texts from the Old Testament. There are three in particular which became the foundation of this teaching: “Whoever is a little one, let him come to me” (Proverbs 9:4). “For to him that is little, mercy will be shown” (Wisdom 6:6). “As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall fondle you” (Isaiah 66:12–13).

These texts do not exhaust the Old Testament teaching on this matter. We have such texts as the following: “The declaration of your word gives light and understanding to little ones” (Psalm 119:130). “The testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones” (Psalm 19:7). “The Lord is the keeper of little ones” (Psalm 116:6).

When we consider meditatively these teachings so frequently repeated in both the Old and the New Testaments, we cannot help but feel that it must be tremendously important to become a “little one,” to enter into the state of spiritual childhood. In his teaching on the matter, Benedict XV reasoned this way: “When a teacher adopts various methods to inculcate the same lesson, does he not thereby seek to emphasize its value in his sight? If Jesus Christ used so many devices to drive home this lesson to His disciples, it is because He wishes, by one means or another, to ensure their thorough understanding of it. From this we must conclude it was the divine Master’s express desire that His disciples should see that THE WAY OF SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD IS THE PATH WHICH LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE.”

What better teacher can we have than the one set up by God Himself, namely, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus? And where can we find these teachings best expressed if not in her own writings which she wanted to see published immediately after her death for this very purpose? *Story of a Soul* has a very interesting history. [As of 1974, when this Introduction was written, it] has been in circulation for the past seventy-five years and has been read and pondered by millions of Thérèse’s devoted admirers. Its title, *Story of a Soul*, is the original French title, *Histoire d’une Ame*, which was inspired by the very first words Thérèse

penned when she began her writing: "It is to you, dear Mother, to you who are doubly my Mother, that I come to confide the story of my soul."

This story, the humble, simple, and joyful acknowledgement of God's mercy and love in her own uncomplicated life, captured the interest and attention of its readers from the first time it appeared in print. In fact, we can say that Thérèse's book, like the simple and direct message of the Gospels, can be the source of a deep religious inspiration for those who read it with an open mind. Shortly after its first publication in 1898, one man openly and candidly admitted: "I have read this book three times already, and each time it has made me a better man." This statement has been repeated over and over again in various ways by its many readers.

And yet the writer of this book, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, at the time this man made this statement, was unknown, unpraised, unimportant. She had finished writing her book only a few months before her death on September 30, 1897, when she was not yet twenty-five years old. She had spent fifteen years of her life in the comparative safety of a devout, Catholic household, and the remaining nine years in the quiet atmosphere of a cloistered community of some twenty Carmelite nuns at Lisieux, Normandy. What made this young, inexperienced girl write the story of her soul? Did she actually think that she had something worthwhile to teach the world? The answer to these questions lies, I think, in the mysterious designs of divine Providence. When we consider the seemingly accidental way in which this book was written, and when we further consider the spiritual impact it has had on all types of people in all nations, we are literally forced to say: The hand of God is here.

We come now to the presentation of a little history regarding the origin of Thérèse's writings. Thanks to the recent publication (1973) of the Process of Beatification and Canonization of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, we have some precise information regarding these writings. It has been known now for a long time, in fact, ever since 1914, that the book published in 1898 under the title: *Histoire d'une Ame* (Story

of a Soul) was not, as it appeared, the pouring out of Thérèse's soul to Mother Marie de Gonzague, her Prioress. It was rather a collection of three different manuscripts, addressed to three different persons, during three different years, namely, 1895, 1896, and 1897.

If you glance at the Table of Contents in this book, you will find three general divisions of its material: Manuscript A, Manuscript B, and Manuscript C. I shall deal with each of these manuscripts, trying to give some background on how each came into existence. I think an understanding of this leads to a greater appreciation of Thérèse's message.

The first manuscript, Manuscript A, was addressed to Mother Agnes, Thérèse's older sister Pauline and Prioress of the Carmel from 1893 to 1896. We shall listen to her testimony at the Diocesan Process when she was asked to speak specifically about the origin and composition of the manuscript entitled: The springtime story of a little white flower written by herself and dedicated to the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus. Her answer was:

"At the beginning of the year 1895, two and half years before the death of Sister Thérèse, I was with my two sisters (Marie and Thérèse) one winter evening. Sister Thérèse was telling me about several incidents in her childhood, and Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (my older sister Marie) said: 'Ah, Mother, what a pity we don't have this in writing; if you were to ask Sister Thérèse to write her childhood memories for you, what pleasure this would give us!' I answered: 'I don't ask anything better.' Then turning to Sister Thérèse, who was laughing because she thought we were teasing, I said: 'I order you to write down all your childhood memories.'"

Thérèse, we learn, was somewhat surprised by this command, and she asked humbly: "What can I write that you don't already know?" However, she undertook the work out of obedience and evidently without reluctance because she writes: "It is with great happiness, then, that I come to sing the mercies of the Lord with you, dear Mother."

Mother Agnes continues: “She wrote during her free time and gave me her copybook on January 20, 1896, for my feast day. I was at evening prayer. When passing by to go to her place, Sister Thérèse knelt down and handed me this treasure. I acknowledged it with a simple nod of my head and placed it at my side without opening it. I did not read it until after the elections that took place in the spring of that year. I noticed the Servant of God’s virtue: after her act of obedience, she was no longer preoccupied with the matter, never asking me whether I had read it or what I thought of it. One day, I told her that I hadn’t had time to read any of it; she appeared in no way troubled.”

We have some further testimony from Thérèse’s sister Céline (Sister Geneviève), who testified at the same Diocesan Process that she composed her chief work (*Histoire d’une Ame*) at the order of Mother Agnes. She continues: “She had no ulterior motive when she began her manuscript. She wrote simply through obedience, trying above all to relate incidents specific to each member of the family in order to please all through the account of the memories of her youth. Her manuscript was really a ‘family souvenir,’ destined exclusively for her sisters. This explains the familiar style and certain childish details from which her pen would have recoiled if she had foreseen that this writing would ever go outside the family circle. She wrote by fits and starts, during the rare free moments left her by the Rule and her occupations among the novices. She did not make a rough draft, but she wrote what came into her mind, and yet her manuscript contains no erasure marks.”

In this account of her childhood memories, Thérèse distinguishes “three separate periods.” The first “extends from the dawn of my reason until the departure of our dear Mother for heaven” (August 28, 1877). Although this represents a very short period of time, Thérèse states that it “is not the least filled with memories.” She uses many of the letters her mother had written to Pauline during this period of her childhood. The second period lasts for a little more than nine years, and Thérèse, much affected by the death of her Mother, refers to these years as “the most painful of the three periods.” She tells us that she had withdrawn

into herself and become excessively given to tears and to sensitiveness. This period covers the five years she spent at the Benedictine Abbey as a day-boarder, and she calls these “the saddest years in my life.” The last period begins when Thérèse is in her fourteenth year, still subject to much crying, etc., but there is a sudden change because of a certain grace she received on Christmas night, 1886. This changed her character completely. She refers to it as her “conversion.”

The account of her childhood memories comes to an end with her trip to Rome and her subsequent entrance into Carmel. There is not much information given on her religious life, and, in fact, Thérèse apologizes for “abridging” it the way she did. However, she does not fail to give an account of how she finally surrendered totally to God’s Merciful Love through her great Act of Oblation, June 9, 1895.

Manuscript B was addressed to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, who testified at the Process: “I asked her myself during her last retreat (September 1896) to put in writing her little doctrine as I called it.” We must remember that Thérèse had her first hemoptysis (coughing up of blood due to a lung hemorrhage) in the very early hours of the morning of Good Friday, April 3, 1896. She referred to this occurrence as the “first call” of Jesus. “It was like a sweet and distant murmur announcing the arrival of the Bridegroom.” A few months afterward, she confided to her sister Marie a consoling dream she had on May 10, in which she saw and heard Venerable Mother Anne of Jesus confirm the presentiment she had of her approaching end. Convinced that her sister was not to live too long, Marie wrote a note to her on September 13, 1896, in which she states: “I am writing to you, not because I have something to say to you but in order to get something from you, from you who are so close to God, from you who are His privileged little spouse, to whom He confides His secrets. The secrets of Jesus to Thérèse are very sweet and I want to hear them again. Write me a short note; this will probably be your last retreat. . . .” She concludes by saying that Thérèse has permission to answer immediately.

Thérèse did answer within the next three days, for there is a letter extant from Marie, dated September 16, 1896, acknowledging receipt of the manuscript. In very small writing, on three sheets of folded paper, Thérèse reveals the secrets of her own heart. There are many corrections on this manuscript which show that it was written in great haste and in a state of extreme fatigue.

A text as compact as Manuscript B, the jewel of all Thérèse's writings, cannot be summed up except in this exclamation: "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."

Manuscript C is addressed to Mother Marie de Gonzague, elected Prioress in the Spring elections on March 21, 1896. Mother Agnes stated at the Process that when she read over Thérèse's first manuscript and realized that the latter had written nothing about her religious life, she regretted it very much. However, she was no longer the Prioress and could no longer tell her sister to make up for the deficiency. She had to win Mother Marie de Gonzague over to her cause, and she succeeded in doing this.

"On the night of June 2, 1897, four months before the death of Sister Thérèse, I went to see Mother Prioress. I said to her: 'Mother, it is impossible for me to sleep until I confide a secret to you: When I was Prioress, Sister Thérèse wrote down the memories of her childhood in order to please me and through obedience. I read this over again the other day; it's very good, but you will not be able to obtain much information to write her circular (obituary notice) after her death, for there is almost nothing in it about her religious life. If you were to tell her to do so, she could write something of a much more serious nature, and I don't doubt that you will have something better than I do.'"

There is a great deal of feminine diplomacy in this approach, but it did succeed and the following morning Mother Marie de Gonzague

told Thérèse to continue her writing. We have therefore the final manuscript made up of two rather lengthy chapters. Thérèse was to spend only a few hours a day, during the space of a month, in the writing of this last manuscript. Mother Agnes testified that she ceased writing during the first week of July because of the progression of her illness. Thérèse admits that she was interrupted frequently during the writing and was unable to arrange her thoughts properly. In spite of the difficulties under which she labored, she has succeeded in producing a very beautiful piece of literature. There is much in these concluding chapters that reveals the real Thérèse. In them we find so many lights she had on various Scripture passages, especially on the virtue of charity; we find, too, that in her dealings with the other nuns there was much of the human element that she had to overcome by great struggles. Her great trial of faith removes her forever from that category of sanctity in which she has been so often placed, the sweet sentimentality that none of us appreciates.

When we read the above material, we can readily see that not a single one of these manuscripts was ever written with a view to world-wide publication. The first was composed as a “family souvenir,” and it did contain “certain childish details from which Thérèse’s pen would have recoiled if she had foreseen that this writing would ever go outside the family circle.” The second manuscript was done exclusively for Marie at her own request; it too was a kind of “souvenir” of Thérèse’s last retreat. The third was made for Mother Marie de Gonzague, its purpose being to supply her with information for composing a “circular” after Thérèse’s death.

When Thérèse was given a premonition of her future mission during those last months of her life, a mission that was to last until the end of time, and when she realized that her manuscripts would be closely associated with the spread of this mission, at least in part, we can understand why she saw the need for a revision in her manuscripts. She supplied for this by appointing her sister Pauline, Mother Agnes of

Jesus, as “mon historien.” She gave her permission to add, to delete, to make any changes necessary.

After Thérèse’s death, Mother Agnes carried out her sister’s directive as quickly as possible: “After my death, you must speak to no one about my manuscript before it is published; you must speak only to Mother Prioress about it. If you act otherwise, the devil will lay more than one trap to hinder God’s work, a very important work!” When Mother Agnes approached the Prioress for permission to publish all three manuscripts, the latter agreed but laid down as a “*conditio sine qua non*” that all three must be rearranged in such a way as to seem to be addressed to herself. Mother Agnes agreed with the condition. The publication one year later, September 30, 1898, of the book entitled *Histoire d’une Ame* read beautifully because of Mother Agnes’s masterly work of editing. It also appeared as a composite whole that contained the intimate outpourings of Sister Thérèse’s soul to her Mother Prioress, Marie de Gonzague. The subsequent editions retained this format until the Diocesan Process held in 1910. The judges on this tribunal, on hearing about Mother Marie’s directive, insisted that all future editions of *Histoire d’une Ame* indicate clearly the individual direction of each of the manuscripts, namely, to Mother Agnes of Jesus, to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, and finally to Mother Marie de Gonzague. This was done with the 1914 editions.

As the fame of St. Thérèse of Lisieux grew and special studies of her works were undertaken, it was only natural that theologians would be satisfied only with her original, unedited manuscripts. Requests were made for their publication. Permission was finally granted by the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux in August 1947. Shortly thereafter Mother Agnes received the following letter from Very Reverend Marie-Eugène, Definitor General of the Discalced Carmelite Order: “The Church has spoken. The sainthood and the doctrinal mission of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus are universally recognized. From now on she belongs to the Church and to history. To avoid and to refute partial or mistaken interpretations of her doctrine and in order that her doctrine and her soul

should be still more deeply understood, the documents that you have so generously given us are insufficient. Only the original texts can allow us to discover the movement of her thought, its living rhythm, and disclose all the light contained in her definitions, which are usually so firm and precise.”

When Mother Agnes sat down and read this letter, she was somewhat overwhelmed by the demand that was being made on her. After all, she was now an old woman in her late eighties, eighty-six to be exact, and as a consequence she was both tired and somewhat fearful. While she was willing to have Thérèse’s original works finally published, the undertaking seemed too much for her strength. She obtained a delay from Rome. She instructed her sister Céline, Sister Geneviève, to take charge of this work after her own death: “After my death I order you to do it in my name.”

Mother Agnes lived for another four years and died on July 28, 1951. A year later steps were taken to obtain permission for the publication of the Manuscripts. This was given by Rome on September 19, 1952. Mother Agnes was not wrong when she felt the work was far too much for her, for it took Father François de Sainte Marie, O.C.D., four long years to make all the necessary preparations for the photostatic publication of Thérèse’s three original manuscripts. This publication was printed the next year, 1957.

When he sent his copy of Thérèse’s original manuscripts to the printer, Father François had been very careful about what he did. He realized that there was a demand for Thérèse’s original writings without any additions or deletions, etc., and this is exactly what he scrupulously provided. The result: *Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus—Manuscrits autobiographiques*. This contained no additions, no deletions, practically no paragraphs, no division into chapters, no prologue, no epilogue. There was a certain starkness about the book that made it very unattractive to the ordinary reader, and especially to the old friends of Thérèse who had come to know her in the pages of *Histoire d’une Ame*. These old friends missed the homey atmosphere of that old book. They

wanted it back. This is why there was a new publication in French of Thérèse's work. It was published in 1972. A note on the formation of the book explains the reasons for its publication:

"For the occasion of the centenary of St. Thérèse's birth, January 2, 1973, many people expressed the desire for a new edition of the Autobiographical Manuscripts. While retaining the scientific tone of the Manuscripts, this new edition should meet the needs of the ordinary person and appear under the form of a biography of Thérèse similar to the *Histoire d'une Ame* [Story of a Soul]. The team that produced this book answered this twofold request: (1) fidelity to the authentic text as it came from Thérèse's pen; (2) fidelity to the first edition of *Histoire d'une Ame* (1898), which Mother Agnes had conceived as a complete biography of Thérèse for the ordinary reader."

This book is a translation of the French publication made in 1972 to fill these specifications. With reference to the first specification, fidelity to the authentic text as it came from Thérèse's pen, readers may feel certain that what they are reading is what she herself wrote. Many portions of her original manuscripts had to be deleted for good reasons, and even Thérèse realized this when she told her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, to delete what was necessary. These portions are contained in this book, and I feel that their contents make her personality even more attractive. In them, without constraint, she expresses herself as she really was, and appears even more human.

With reference to the second specification, fidelity to the first edition of *Histoire d'une Ame* (1898), which Mother Agnes conceived as a complete biography of Thérèse for the ordinary reader, a glance at the format of this book will make this evident. First, its division into eleven chapters is the same as that made by Mother Agnes; second, the addition of a Prologue explaining family origins and an Epilogue explaining Thérèse's illness, last agony, and death was also Mother Agnes's idea; finally, there are some long footnotes of certain additions made to Thérèse's texts by Mother Agnes in order to elucidate some points of family history.

In closing, I would like to assure Thérèse's readers that I have tried to be absolutely faithful in translating into English what she beautifully expressed in French. After her friends have waited so long to read her in the original manuscripts, it would be a shame, I think, to give them an interpretation of her words rather than an exact rendition. Consequently, I have deliberately retained her own choice of words because this best expressed her feelings; I have retained her exclamation points even though we seldom use them; I have capitalized words that she capitalized because they had a special significance for her; I have retained throughout the text her habit of direct address to the one to whom she is writing; finally, Thérèse frequently emphasized her thought by either underlining words and sentences or writing them in larger script; this has been duplicated here through the use of italics or capital letters. All Scripture quotations are italicized.

“O Jesus! why can't I tell all *little souls* how unspeakable is Your condescension? I feel that if You found a soul weaker and littler than mine, You would be pleased to grant it still greater favors, provided it abandoned itself with total confidence to Your infinite Mercy. I beg You to cast Your Divine Glance upon a great number of *little souls*. I beg You to choose a legion of *little Victims* worthy of Your LOVE!”

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

John Clarke, O.C.D.

September 8, 1974

PROLOGUE



“There is nothing as mysterious as those preparations attending man on the threshold of life. Everything is played out before we are twelve.”

In what concerns St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, everything was not really played out until September 30, 1897, when, consumed by tuberculosis, she expired at the age of twenty-four years and nine months.

And still her contemporary, Charles Péguy, was speaking about her too, so true is it that a human destiny is rooted in a soil, an epoch, a family, and is dependent on a heredity and a history. As John Donne wrote: “No man is an island.” Thérèse did not descend from heaven like an angel, but was born on Norman soil, dependent on her ancestors and her country.

Before the whole world was to honor St. Thérèse of Lisieux and her “Way of Childhood,” a child already existed, namely, Thérèse Martin of Alençon.

She is truly the mysterious fruit of those secret preparations. Had her parents followed the inclinations of their heart, “the greatest saint of modern times” would never have seen the light of day.

Descended from a family of soldiers, and the son of a soldier attached to successive barracks (Avignon, Strasbourg), Louis Martin was born at Bordeaux on August 22, 1823. He was acquainted with the life of army camps and was raised in the atmosphere of the Napoleonic legend, though his father joined the royalist armies during the Hundred

Days. Captain under the Restoration, the future grandfather of Thérèse took up residence at Alençon in 1830.

Orderly, methodical, of a solitary and meditative temperament, his son Louis learned the watchmaking trade, which requires much patience and precision. At the age of 22 he dreamed of a much more solitary life and presented himself as a candidate at the monastery of the great St. Bernard. He was refused because he did not have any knowledge of Latin. After a sojourn in Paris, he settled down as a watchmaker at Alençon and lived with his parents on rue du Pont-Neuf. For the next eight years he led a quasi-monastic life that was filled with travel, prayer, reading, fishing—his favorite pastime—and frequenting the company of his friends in the Catholic Club.

Alençon, the chief town of Orne, had a population of 13,600 inhabitants at this time. It was a quiet little town, perfectly suitable for this quiet man. It owed its fame solely to the art of its lacemakers, who export the famous “Point d’Alençon” to all parts of France and especially to Paris.

Zélie Guérin was born into a family of peasant background on December 23, 1831. She, too, was brought up in a military atmosphere as her father was present at Wagram and terminated his career in the gendarmes. He retired in 1844 to Alençon, 36 rue Saint-Blaise, opposite the Prefecture.

Reared by this overbearing father and by a mother who showed her little affection, Zélie one day wrote her brother: “My childhood and youth were as dismal as a winding sheet; although my mother spoiled you, she was very severe with me as you know. Even though she was very good, she did not know how to take me, and I suffered very much interiorly” (family correspondence, November 7, 1865). She expressed her love for this brother Isidore, who was studying to be a pharmacist, and for her sister Elise, her confidante, who entered the Visitation convent at Le Mans under the name Sister Marie-Dosithée. She carried on a correspondence with them right up until her death, a correspondence that revealed her restless and often melancholic temperament, but her

lively character too, her eagerness for work, her faith under every trial, her good sense, and even her humor.

She dreamed of the religious life just as Louis Martin did, and like him, she was categorically refused when she sought permission to join the Sisters of the Hôtel Dieu at Alençon. Then she took up the manufacture of the “Point d’Alençon,” opening an “office” of her own with her sister’s help. A clever worker, she was to be supremely successful.

Refused entrance into the religious life, the watchmaker of 35 and lacemaker of 27 met and after a short engagement were married at Alençon in the Church of Notre-Dame, July 13, 1858.

They settled down on the rue du Pont-Neuf and lived for a period of ten months as brother and sister. The intervention of a confessor, however, made them change their mind, and nine children were born into this home from 1860 to 1873. Mme. Martin wrote before the birth of her last child, Thérèse: “I love children even to the point of folly and was born to have some of my own. But soon the time for this will be ended since I will be 41 this month, and this is the time when one is a grandmother!”

Five daughters only were to survive, for this was the epoch in which infant mortality was still unconquered. In poor health, weakened by a breast cancer that was declared incurable only in 1876, Mme. Martin hesitantly resigned herself to entrusting her fifth child and those who followed to nurses who were more or less conscientious. For fifteen years there was a rhythm between births and deaths. The parents were to witness two little boys and two little girls depart for heaven. One of the girls was the delightful Hélène who reached the age of five. Her mother wrote of her:

Since I lost this child, I experience an intense desire to see her once more. However, those who remain need me and for their sake I ask God to leave me a few more years on earth. I was saddened over the death of my two little boys but much more over the loss of this one, for I had begun to enjoy her company. She was so

good, so affectionate, and so advanced for her years! There is not a moment of the day when I am not thinking of her. (March 27, 1870)

The war of 1870 and its aftermath—they had to lodge nine German soldiers—did not interrupt the increase in this family nor its entrance to lower middle class status through the mother's incessant toil. She used to rise early and retire late, and was now aided in her work by her husband, who had sold his watchmaking and jewelry business. The Martins moved and came to live on rue Saint-Blaise in a house that one can still visit today.

Family life held a privileged position. They were content only when together. Marie, the eldest and the father's favorite, and Pauline, lively, mischievous, and the mother's confidante, were exiled each year to the Visitation at Le Mans. The two boarders lived there happily under the vigilant eye of their aunt, Sister Marie-Dosithée. She reported to their mother on the girls' scholastic progress, their conduct, and she appreciated very much their different temperaments. Each return for summer vacation set off explosions of joy, and each return to school brought on a torrent of tears!

"Poor Léonie," the least talented, frequently ill, was the sole worry of her mother. Céline, "the intrepid," was soon to become the inseparable companion of Thérèse.

Walks to the "Pavilion" or into the Norman countryside, trips to Semallé, visits to the family of Uncle Guérin, a pharmacist in Lisieux, train journeys to Le Mans to visit Aunt Marie-Dosithée, all these left their impressions on the Martin children, who remembered these simple joys all their lives. The seven deaths that put the family into mourning between 1859 and 1870—three grandparents and four children—did not extinguish the affectionate ardor uniting the members.

What could have been austere and unbending in the father's personality was compensated for by the indulgent kindness he showed for his noisy brood who could have upset his love for silence and peace. He did not disdain enlivening the family evenings by reciting the poems of

famous authors of the day, the romanticists, singing old-fashioned tunes in his beautiful voice, and making miniature toys, much to the admiration of his daughters.

The mother, frequently worried over the future—she felt her strength ebbing—managed her household with the “really incredible and prodigious courage of the strong woman! Adversity does not get her down nor does prosperity make her proud,” wrote her sister on October 25, 1868. Her realism, lively candor, and loving consideration all made her the soul of the family.

There reigned in the Martin family a solid faith that saw God in all life’s events, paying Him a permanent homage: family prayers together, morning attendance at Mass, frequent reception of Holy Communion—rare in an epoch when Jansenism continued its ravages—Sunday Vespers, retreats. Their whole life revolved around the liturgical year, pilgrimages, a scrupulous regard for fasts and abstinences. Yet there was nothing stiff and bigoted in this family that was unacquainted with formality. They could be active and contemplative, feeding abandoned children, tramps, and the aged. Zélie took time out of her few short hours of nightly rest to attend to an ailing housemaid, while Louis went out of his way to help the disinherited, the epileptic, the dying. Both parents taught their children to respect the poor.

The mother loved to see her children dressed attractively, and when Sister Marie-Dosithée was concerned at hearing that Marie was enjoying herself with girls of her own age, she said: “Must they shut themselves up in a cloister? In the world we cannot live in seclusion! There is something to take and something to leave in everything the ‘holy girl’ tells us” (November 12, 1876).

When she was four months pregnant, Mme. Martin announced to the Guérins “an event that will probably take place toward the end of the year,” that is, in 1872. She writes also that she hopes the child will be born in good health. Such is the first mention of the existence of the one whom they were already calling “little Thérèse” in memory of a Thérèse who died when five months old.

And then comes the good news: “My little daughter was born yesterday, Thursday, at 11:30 at night. She is very strong and healthy, and they say she weighs eight pounds; let’s put it at six pounds, and that is not bad! She seems very nice. I suffered only a half-hour, and what I experienced before is not to be counted. She will be baptized on Saturday, and you will be the only ones missing to make the celebration complete. Marie will be the godmother, and a little boy, almost her age, the godfather” (January 3, 1873).

Everything went as announced by Mme. Martin. The only unexpected thing was this note brought to rue Saint-Blaise by a child; its father had written this short poem:

<i>Souris et grandit vite</i>	Smile and grow quickly
<i>Au bonheur, Tout t’invite,</i>	Everything promises you happiness.
<i>Tendre soins, tendre Amour</i>	Tender care, tender Love
<i>Oui, souris à l’Aurore,</i>	Yes, smile at the Dawn,
<i>Bouton qui viens d’éclore</i>	Bud that just blossomed,
<i>Tu seras Rose un jour.</i>	One day you will be a Rose.

She was hardly born when Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin knew suffering: at two weeks she just missed being carried off by intestinal troubles; at three months, there was still a more serious danger: “She is very bad and I have no hope whatsoever of saving her. The poor little thing suffers horribly since yesterday. It breaks your heart to see her” (March 1, 1873).

The crisis over, the mother was forced, on the doctor’s advice, to entrust Thérèse to a friendly nurse. For a whole year, nursed by the strong and vivacious Rose Taillé, the little one led the life of a little peasant. At Semallé she grew into a big baby, tanned by the sun. There she drank in a zest for life among the flowers and the animals. Her mother wrote on July 20, 1873: “Her nurse brings her out to the fields in a wheelbarrow, seated on top a load of hay; she hardly ever cries. Little Rose says that one could hardly find a better child.”

Blond, blue-eyed, very attractive, precocious, lively, very touchy, capable of violent outbursts of temper, stubborn, Thérèse very quickly became the favorite. She was “devoured by kisses” by the whole family, and this especially because they were deprived of her presence. “All my life God was pleased to surround me with love, and my first memories are imprinted with the most tender smiles and caresses!”

Thérèse was to write at the age of 23: “Ah! how rapidly the sunny years of my early childhood passed by, but what a sweet impression they left on my soul! Everything on earth smiled at me. I found flowers under each of my steps, and my happy disposition contributed also to making my life pleasing.”

Her mother’s death broke up this happiness and necessitated the departure of the family to Lisieux. But let Thérèse herself tell us.

THÉRÈSE'S FAMILY AND COUSINS



The Family

Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin married on July 13, 1858. They had the following children:

- Marie, born February 22, 1860, became a Carmelite October 15, 1886 (Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart), died January 19, 1940.
- Pauline, born September 7, 1861, became a Carmelite October 2, 1882 (Mother Agnes of Jesus), died July 28, 1951.
- Léonie, born June 3, 1863, became a Visitandine January 28, 1899 (Sister Françoise-Thérèse), died June 16, 1941.
- Hélène, born October 13, 1864, died February 22, 1870.
- Joseph-Louis, born September 20, 1866, died February 14, 1867.
- Joseph-Jean-Baptiste, born December 19, 1867, died August 24, 1868.
- Céline, born April 28, 1869, became a Carmelite September 14, 1894 (Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face), died February 25, 1959.
- Mélanie-Thérèse, born August 16, 1870, died October 8, 1870.
- Thérèse, born January 2, 1873, became a Carmelite April 9, 1888 (Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face), died September 30, 1897.

Cousins of Thérèse

Fanny Martin, aunt of Thérèse, married on April 11, 1842, François-Adolphe Leriche (born in 1818, died May 25, 1843). They had a child:

- Adolphe Leriche, born January 7, 1844, died December 7, 1894.

Isidore Guérin, uncle of Thérèse, married on September 11, 1866, Céline Fournet (born March 15, 1847, died February 13, 1900). They had the following children:

- Jeanne, born February 24, 1868, died April 25, 1938, who married on October 1, 1890, François La Néele, a doctor.
- Marie, born August 22, 1870, died April 14, 1905, became a Carmelite at Lisieux August 15, 1895 (Sister Marie of the Eucharist).
- A son, born dead, October 16, 1871.

Manuscript Dedicated
to
Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus

MANUSCRIPT A

CHAPTER I

ALENÇON
(1873–1877)

The Mercies of the Lord
Surrounded by Love
The Trip to Le Mans
Her Character
“I Choose All!”



J.M.J.T.

January 1895

Jesus+

*Springtime story of a little white flower written by herself and
dedicated to the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus.*

It is to you, dear Mother, to you who are doubly my Mother that I come to confide the story of my soul. The day you asked me to do this, it seemed to me it would distract my heart by too much concentration on myself, but since then Jesus has made me feel that in obeying simply, I would be pleasing Him; besides, I'm going to be doing only one thing: I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: "*The Mercies of the Lord.*"¹

Before taking up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary² (the one that has given so many proofs of the maternal preferences of heaven's Queen for our family), and I begged her to guide my hand that it trace no line displeasing to her. Then opening the Holy Gospels my eyes fell on these words: "And going up a mountain, he called to him men of his *own choosing*; and they came to him" (St. Mark, chap. III, v. 13). This is the mystery of my vocation, my whole life, and especially the mystery of the privileges Jesus showered on my soul. He does not call those who are worthy but those whom He *pleases* or as St. Paul says: "God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will show pity to whom he will show pity. So then there is question not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy" (Ep. to the Rom., chap. IX, v. 15 and 16).

I wondered for a long time why God has preferences, why all souls don't receive an equal amount of graces. I was surprised when I saw

1. Psalm 89:2.

2. The "Virgin of the Smile," which is in the present shrine of St. Thérèse. The Martin family held it in special veneration. In January 1895 it was in the room outside her cell.

Him shower His extraordinary favors on saints who had offended Him, for instance, St. Paul and St. Augustine, and whom He forced, so to speak, to accept His graces. When reading the lives of the saints, I was puzzled at seeing how Our Lord was pleased to caress certain ones from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their way when coming to Him, helping them with such favors that they were unable to soil the immaculate beauty of their baptismal robe. I wondered why poor savages died in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced.

Jesus deigned to teach me this mystery. He set before me the book of nature; I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the Lily do not take away the perfume of the little violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers.

And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden. He willed to create great souls comparable to Lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at his feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be.

I understood, too, that Our Lord's love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul who resists His grace in nothing as in the most excellent soul; in fact, since the nature of love is to humble oneself, if all souls resembled those of the holy Doctors who illumined the Church with the clarity of their teachings, it seems God would not descend so low when coming to their heart. But He created the child who knows only how to make his feeble cries heard; He has created the poor savage who has nothing but the natural law to guide him. It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself. These are the wild flowers whose simplicity attracts Him. When coming down in this way, God manifests His infinite grandeur. Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so

Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it. And just as in nature all the seasons are arranged in such a way as to make the humblest daisy bloom on a set day, in the same way, everything works out for the good of each soul.

Perhaps you are wondering, dear Mother, with some astonishment where I am going from here, for up till now I've said nothing that resembles the story of my life. But you asked me to write under no constraint whatever would come into my *mind*. It is not, then, my life, properly so-called, that I am going to write; it is my *thoughts* on the graces God designed to grant me. I find myself at a period in my life when I can cast a glance on the past; my soul has matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trials. And now, like a flower strengthened by the storm, I can raise my head and see the words of Psalm 23 realized in me: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me . . ."³ To me the Lord has always been "merciful and good, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps. 103, v. 8).

It is with great happiness, then, that I come to sing the mercies of the Lord with you, dear Mother. It is for *you alone* I am writing the story of the *little flower* gathered by Jesus. I will talk freely and without any worries as to the numerous digressions I will make. A mother's heart understands her child even when it can but stammer, and so I'm sure of being understood by you, who formed my heart, offering it up to Jesus!

It seems to me that if a little flower could speak, it would tell simply what God has done for it without trying to hide its blessings. It would not say, under the pretext of a false humility, it is not beautiful or without perfume, that the sun has taken away its splendor and the storm has broken its stem when it knows that all this is untrue. The flower about to tell her story rejoices at having to publish the totally gratuitous gifts of Jesus. She knows that nothing in herself was capable

3. Psalm 23:1-4.

of attracting the divine glances, and His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her.

It was He who had her born in a holy soil, impregnated with a *virginal perfume*. It was He, too, who has her preceded by eight Lilies of dazzling whiteness. In His love He wished to preserve His little flower from the world's poisoned breath. Hardly had her petals begun to unfold when this divine Savior transplanted her to Mount Carmel where already two Lilies, who had taken care of her in the springtime of her life, spread their sweet perfume. Seven years have passed by since the little flower took root in the garden of the Spouse of Virgins, and now *three* Lilies bloom in her presence. A little farther off another lily expands under the eyes of Jesus. The two stems who brought these flowers into existence are now reunited for all eternity in the heavenly Fatherland. There they have found once again the four Lilies the earth had not seen develop. Oh! may Jesus deign not to allow a long time to pass on these strange shores for the flowers left in exile. May the Lily-plant be soon complete in Heaven!⁴

I have just summed up in a few words, dear Mother, what God did for me. Now I will go into detail about the years of my childhood. I realize that here where others would see nothing but a tedious recital, your *motherly heart* will find some facts that are charming. Besides, the memories I'm about to evoke are also yours since my childhood unfolded near you, and I have the good fortune to belong to Parents without equal who surrounded us both with the same cares and the same tenderness. Oh! may they bless the littlest of their children and help her to sing the divine mercies!

In the story of my soul, up until my entrance into Carmel, I distinguish three separate periods. The first is not the least fruitful in memories in spite of its short duration. It extends from the dawn of my reason till our dear Mother's departure for Heaven.

4. In this figurative language Thérèse describes her family. When she was writing, there were "three Lilies" with her in Carmel, viz., Marie, Pauline, and Céline; another, Léonie, was in the Visitation convent at Caen. Thérèse describes her two parents as "the two stems reunited for all eternity."

God granted me the favor of opening my intelligence at an early age and of imprinting childhood recollections so deeply on my memory that it seems the things I'm about to recount happened only yesterday. Jesus in His love willed, perhaps, that I know the matchless Mother He had given me, but whom His hand hastened to crown in heaven.

God was pleased all through my life to surround me with *love*, and the first memories I have are stamped with smiles and the most tender caresses. But although He placed so much *love* near me, He also sent much love into my little heart, making it warm and affectionate. I loved Mama and Papa very much and showed my tenderness for them in a thousand ways, for I was very expressive. The means I employed at times were strange, as this passage from one of Mama's letters proves:

"Baby is a little imp; she'll kiss me and at the same time wish me to die. 'Oh, how I wish you would die, dear little Mother!' When I scold her she answers: 'It is because I want you to go to heaven, and you say we must die to get there!' She wishes the same for her Father in her outbursts of affection for him."⁵

And here's another passage from a letter dated June 25, 1874. I was only a year and a half: "Your Father just installed a swing, and Céline's joy knows no bounds. But you should see the little one using it; it's funny to see her trying to conduct herself as a big girl. There's no danger of her letting the rope go. When the swing doesn't go fast enough, she cries. We attached her to it with a rope, but in spite of this I'm still uneasy to see her perched so high.

"A strange thing happened to me regarding the little one. I'm in the habit of attending the 5:30 Mass in the morning, but at first I didn't dare leave her alone. Seeing she didn't wake up early I decided to leave her. I'd place her in my bed and set the cradle alongside the bed so that she couldn't fall out. One day, I forgot the cradle. I returned and the little one was no longer in the bed; at the same moment I heard a whimper; I looked and saw her in a sitting position in a chair at the

5. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, December 5, 1875.

head of my bed. She was sleeping fitfully as she was uncomfortable with her head resting on a cushion.

“I can’t understand how she fell onto the chair in a sitting position since she was in the bed. I thanked God, feeling it was providential as she could have tumbled onto the floor. Her good Angel watched over her and the souls in purgatory protected her. I pray every day to them for her. This is my explanation for it; explain it the way you like.”

At the end of the letter Mama added: “The little one has just placed her hand on my face and kissed me. This poor little thing doesn’t want to leave me; she’s continually at my side. She likes going into the garden, but when I’m not there she won’t stay but cries till they bring her to me.”⁶

Here is a passage from another letter:

“Little Thérèse asked me the other day if she would go to Heaven. I told her ‘Yes’ if she were good. She answered: ‘Yes, but if I’m not good, I’ll go to hell. But I know what I will do. I will fly to you in Heaven, and what will God be able to do to take me away? You will be holding me so tightly in your arms!’ I could see in her eyes that she was really convinced that God could do nothing to her if she were in her mother’s arms.”⁷

“Marie loves her little sister very much. She finds her very good, and it would be difficult for her to think otherwise since this poor little thing has a great fear of causing Marie any trouble. Yesterday, knowing she is very happy to be given a rose, I wanted to cut one for her. She began begging me not to do so because Marie had forbidden this. Her face was red with emotion. In spite of this, I gave her two roses, but she did not dare go into the house. It was useless for me to tell her the roses belonged to me. ‘No,’ she insisted, ‘they belong to Marie!’

“She becomes emotional very easily. As soon as she does anything wrong, everybody must know it. Yesterday, not meaning to do so, she

6. In a letter to Pauline, November 1985, Mme. Martin wrote: “She will not climb the stairs all alone, but cries at each step: ‘Mama, Mama!’ If I forget to say: ‘Yes, my child,’ she stops and won’t go any further” (*Histoire d’une Ame*).

7. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, October 29, 1876.

tore off a small piece of wallpaper. She wanted to tell her Father immediately, and you would have pitied her to see her anxiety. When he returned four hours later and everybody had forgotten about it, she ran at once to Marie, saying: 'Marie, hurry and tell Papa I tore the paper.' Then she awaited her sentence as if she were a criminal. There is an idea in her little head that if she owns up to something, she will be more readily forgiven."⁸

I was very fond of my *godmother*.⁹ Without appearing to do so, I paid close attention to what was said and done around me. It seems to me I was judging things then as I do now. I was listening carefully to what Marie was teaching Céline in order to do what Céline did. After Marie came out of the Visitation,¹⁰ to obtain permission to go into the room where she was giving Céline her lessons, I was very good and did everything she wanted. She gave me a lot of gifts, and in spite of their insignificant value these pleased me a lot.

8. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, May 21, 1876. *Histoire d'une Ame* adds: "Coming on our dear little Father's name, I very naturally recall certain happy memories. When he came home I used to run and sit on one of his boots; then he would carry me in this way all around the house and out into the garden. Mama said laughingly to him that he carried out all my wishes; and he answered: 'Well, what do you expect? She's the Queen!' Then he would take me in his arms, lift me very high, set me on his shoulder, kiss and caress me in many ways.

"I cannot say, however, that Papa spoiled me. I remember very well how one day when I was swinging contentedly, he passed by and called out to me: 'Come and kiss me, my little Queen!' Contrary to my usual custom, I didn't want to budge, and I answered boldly: 'Come and get it, Papa!' He paid no attention to me and was right to do so. Marie was there. She said: 'You naughty little girl! How bad it is to answer one's father in this way!' Immediately I jumped off my swing for the correction was not lost on me! The whole house resounded with my cries of sorrow. I climbed the stairs quickly, and this time I didn't call 'Mama' each step, for I thought of nothing but finding Papa and being reconciled to him. This was done very quickly.

"I could not stand the thought of having offended my beloved parents. Acknowledging my faults was the work of an instant as this following incident recounted by my mother shows: 'One morning, I wanted to kiss little Thérèse before going downstairs. She seemed to be in a deep sleep, and I didn't dare awaken her; but Marie said to me: "Mama, she's only pretending to be asleep; I'm sure of it!" Then I leaned over to kiss her forehead, but she immediately hid under her blanket and said with the tone of a spoiled child: "I don't want anybody to see me!" I was very much displeased and let her feel it. Two minutes later I heard her crying and very soon, to my great surprise, I saw her at my side! She had left her bed all by herself and had come downstairs in her bare feet, hindered somewhat by her long nightdress. Her face was bathed in tears, and throwing herself at my knees, she said: "Mama, I was naughty; forgive me!" Pardon was quickly granted. I took my angel in my arms, pressed her to my heart, and covered her with kisses.'" (Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, February 13, 1877.)

9. Marie, Thérèse's oldest sister.

10. She made her studies there.

I was very proud of my two sisters, but the one who was my *ideal* from childhood was Pauline. When I was beginning to talk, Mama would ask me: “What are you thinking about?” and I would answer invariably: “Pauline!” Another time, I was moving my little finger over the windowpanes and I said: “I’m writing Pauline!”

I had often heard it said that surely Pauline would become a *religious*, and without knowing too much about what it meant I thought: “I too *will be a religious*.” This is one of my first memories and I haven’t changed my resolution since then! It was through you, dear Mother, that Jesus chose to espouse me to Himself. You were not with me then, but already a bond was formed between our souls. You were my *ideal*; I wanted to be like you, and it was your example that drew me toward the Spouse of Virgins at the age of two. What sweet reflections I would like to confide to you! But I have to continue the story of the little flower, her complete and general story, for if I were to go into detail about my relationship with you, I would have to leave everything else aside!

Dear little Léonie held a warm place in my heart. She was very fond of me and in the evenings when the family took a walk she used to take care of me. I still seem to hear those beautiful lullabies she used to sing to me to get me to sleep. She was always trying to find ways of pleasing me, and I would be sorry if I caused her any trouble.

I remember very well her First Communion and especially the moment she picked me up in her arms and carried me into the rectory.¹¹ It seemed so nice to be carried by a big sister all in white like myself! In the evening they put me to bed early as I was too little to stay up for the banquet, but I can still see Papa coming at dessert time, carrying a piece of cake to his little Queen.

We accompanied Mama the next day or a few days after to the home of Léonie’s little companion.¹² I believe that was the day our good

11. May 23, 1875, when Thérèse was only two and a half.

12. Armandine Dagoreau. “I remember the poor little girl, Léonie’s companion, whom our Mother dressed for her First Communion, following the custom of the better-off families. This child didn’t leave Léonie for one minute that day! In the evening she was given the place of honor at the banquet” (*Histoire d’une Âme*).

little Mother took us behind a wall to give us a drink of wine after the dinner (which we provided for Mme. Dagoreau), because she didn't want to offend the good woman and didn't want to deprive us of anything. Ah! how delicate a Mother's heart really is, and how it shows its tenderness in a thousand little cares that no one thinks about!

And now I have to speak about my dear Céline, the little companion of my childhood, but the memories here are so numerous I don't know which to choose. I'm going to extract a few passages from letters Mama wrote to you at the Visitation but won't copy them out in full as it would take too long. July 1, 1873, the year of my birth, she said:

"The nurse brought little Thérèse here on Thursday.¹³ The little one did nothing but laugh. Céline pleased her especially and she went into peals of laughter with her. One would say she already wants to play, so that will come soon. She holds herself up on her two little legs straight as a post. I believe she will walk very early and she will be very good. She appears very intelligent and has the face of a little cherub."

I showed my affection for dear little Céline especially after I came home from the nurse's place. We understood each other very well, only I was much more lively and less naive than she; although I was three and a half years younger, it seemed to me we were the same age.

Here is a passage from one of Mama's letters showing how good Céline was and how I was just the opposite. "My little Céline is drawn to the practice of virtue; it's part of her nature; she is candid and has a horror of evil. As for the little imp, one doesn't know how things will go, she is so small, so thoughtless! Her intelligence is superior to Céline's, but she's less gentle and has a stubborn streak in her that is almost invincible; when she says 'no' nothing can make her give in, and one could put her in the cellar a whole day and she'd sleep there rather than say 'yes.'"

"But still she has a heart of gold; she is very lovable and frank; it's curious to see her running after me making her confession: 'Mama,

13. Rose Taillé (1836–1908). She lived at Semallé, about eight miles from Alençon. Thérèse was entrusted to her from March 15 or 16, 1873, until April 2, 1874.

I pushed Céline once, I hit her once, but I won't do it again.' (It's like this for everything she does.) Thursday evening we took a walk in the direction of the train station, and she wanted absolutely to go into the waiting room to go and see Pauline; she was running on ahead with a joy that was pleasant to see, but when she saw we had to return without getting on the train to go to visit Pauline, she cried all the way home."¹⁴

This last part of the letter reminds me of the happiness I experienced when seeing you return from the Visitation; you, dear Mother, took me in your arms and Marie took Céline; then I gave you a thousand hugs and I leaned over in order to admire your long braids. Then you gave me a piece of chocolate that you had kept for three months. Can you imagine what a relic that was for me!

I recall also the trip I made to Le Mans;¹⁵ it was my first train ride. What a joy to see myself on a trip alone with Mama. I don't know why I began to cry, but poor little Mother had nothing to introduce to Aunt¹⁶ at Le Mans but a *plain* little girl all red with the tears she shed on the way. I remember nothing about the visit except the moment when Aunt handed me a little white toy mouse and a little cardboard basket filled with candies, on top of which *were enthroned* two pretty sugar rings, just the right size for my finger. Immediately I exclaimed: "How wonderful! there will be a ring for Céline also!" I took my basket by the handle. I gave the other hand to Mama and we left. After a few steps, I looked at my basket and saw that my candies were almost all strewn out on the street like Tom Thumb's pebbles. I looked again more closely and saw that one of the precious rings had undergone the awful fate of the candies. I had nothing now to give to Céline and so was filled with grief! I asked if I could retrace my steps, but Mama seemed to pay no attention to me. This was too much and my *tears* were followed by loud *cries*. I was unable to understand why she didn't share my pain, and this only increased my grief.

14. Letter to Pauline, May 14, 1876.

15. March 29, 1875.

16. Sister Marie-Dosithée (Marie-Louise Guérin), older sister of Mme. Martin and a religious at the Visitation Convent at Le Mans.

Now I return to the letters in which Mama speaks to you about Céline and me. This is the best means I can use to have you understand my character. Here is a passage where my faults shine forth with great brilliance: “Céline is playing blocks with the little one, and they argue every once in a while. Céline gives in to gain a pearl for her crown. I am obliged to correct this poor little baby who gets into frightful tantrums; when things don’t go just right and according to her way of thinking, she rolls on the floor in desperation like one without any hope. There are times when it gets too much for her and she literally chokes. She’s a nervous child, but she is very good, very intelligent, and remembers everything.”¹⁷

You can see, dear Mother, how far I was from being a faultless little child! They weren’t even able to say about me: “She’s good when she’s asleep” because at night I was more restless than during the day, throwing off the blankets and sending them in all directions and (while still sleeping) banging myself against the wood of my little bed. The pain would awaken me and I’d cry out: “Mama, *I bumped myself!*” Poor little Mother was obliged to get up and convince herself I really had bruises on my forehead, that I really *bumped myself!* She’d cover me up and then go back to bed, but in a short time I would begin *bumping myself* again, so much so they had *to tie* me in bed. And so every evening, little Céline came to tie me up with a lot of cords that were to prevent the little rascal from *bumping herself* and waking up her Mama; this was so successful a means that I was, from then on, *good* when *sleeping*.

There was another fault I had when wide awake, which Mama doesn’t mention in her letters, and this was an excessive self-love. I will give only two examples of this in order not to prolong the recital. One day, Mama said: “Little Thérèse, if you kiss the ground I’ll give you a sou.” A sou was a fortune at the time and to get it I didn’t have to lower my dignity too much, my *little frame* didn’t put much of a distance between my lips and the ground. And still my pride revolted at the

17. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, December 5, 1875.

thought of “kissing the ground”; so standing up straight, I said to Mama: “Oh! no, little Mother, I would prefer not to have the soul!”

Another time we had to go to Grogny to Mme. Monnier’s home. Mama told Marie to dress me in my Sky-blue frock with the lace trimmings but not to leave my arms bare lest the Sun burn them. I allowed myself to be dressed with the indifference a child of my age should really have, but I thought within myself that I would look much more pretty with my arms bare.

With a nature such as my own, had I been reared by Parents without virtue or even if I had been spoiled by the maid, Louise,¹⁸ as Céline was, I would have become very bad and perhaps have even been lost. But Jesus was watching over His little fiancée; He had willed that all turn out for her good, even her faults that, corrected very early, stood her in good stead to make her grow in perfection. As I had an excessive *self-love* and also a *love* of the *good*, as soon as I began to think seriously (which I did when still very little), it was enough for one to tell me a thing wasn’t *good* and I had no desire to repeat it twice.

I see with pleasure that in Mama’s letters I gave her great consolation when growing up. Having nothing but good example around me, I naturally wanted to follow it. This is what she wrote in 1876: “Even Thérèse wants to do little acts of penance at times.¹⁹ She’s a charming child, very alert, very lively, but she is very sensitive. Céline and she are very fond of each other, and are sufficient unto themselves for passing the time. Every day as soon as they’ve eaten dinner Céline takes her little rooster; she catches Thérèse’s little hen with one swoop of her hand, something I can never do, but she’s so lively she gets it in one bound. Then they come with their little pets and sit before the fireplace and amuse themselves for long hours at a time. (It was little Rose who gave me the hen and the rooster, and I gave the rooster to Céline.)

18. Louise Marais (1849–1923), maid in the Martin family from 1865 until the death of Mme. Martin.

19. “It’s funny to see Thérèse put her hand in her pocket a hundred times a day to pull a bead of her chaplet every time she makes a sacrifice of some kind” (*Histoire d’une Ame*).

"The other day Céline slept with me and Thérèse had slept on the second floor in Céline's bed; she had begged Louise to take her downstairs to dress her. Louise went up to get her but found the bed empty. Thérèse had heard Céline and had come down to be with her. Louise said: 'You don't want to get dressed?' Thérèse answered: 'Oh no! Louise, we are like the two hens, we're inseparable!' Saying this they embraced each other and both held each other tightly. Then in the evening Louise, Céline, and Léonie left for the meeting of the Catholic circle and left little Thérèse all alone. She understood she was too little to go to the meeting and she said: 'If they would only let me sleep in Céline's bed!' But no, they didn't want it, so she said nothing and stayed alone with her little lamp and fifteen minutes later fell into a sound sleep."²⁰

Another day Mama wrote: "Céline and Thérèse are inseparable and it's impossible to see two children love each other so much. When Marie comes to get Céline for her classes, poor Thérèse begins to cry. Alas, what's going to become of her, her little friend is leaving! Marie pities her and takes her along too, and the poor little thing sits in a chair for two or three hours on end; she is given some beads to thread or a little piece of cloth to sew, and she doesn't dare budge but heaves deep sighs. When her needle becomes unthreaded, she tries to rethread it; and it's funny to see her, not being able to succeed and still not daring to bother Marie. Soon you can see two big tears rolling down her cheeks! Marie consoles her very quickly, threads the needle, and the poor little angel smiles through her tears."²¹

I remember that I really wasn't able to be without Céline. I'd sooner leave the table without taking my dessert than not to follow her as soon as she got up. Begging for help to get down, I would turn in my highchair, and then we would go out and play together. Sometimes we went with the Mayor's little daughter, and I liked this because of the park and all the beautiful toys she showed us. But most of the time I went there only to please Céline, much preferring to stay in our own

20. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, November 8, 1876.

21. *Ibid.*, March 4, 1877.

little garden to *scrape the walls* and get all the little shiny stones there, then we would go and *sell* them to Papa who bought them from us in *all seriousness*.

On Sunday, as I was too little to go to the services, Mama stayed with me; I was very good, walking around on tiptoe during the Mass; but as soon as I saw the door open, there was an explosion of joy! I would throw myself in front of my *pretty* little sister, “*adorned like a chapel*”²² and say: “Oh! little Céline, hurry, give me the blessed bread!” Sometimes she didn’t have it because she arrived too late. What to do? I wasn’t able to be without it as this was “*my Mass*.” A way was soon found. “You haven’t any blessed bread? Then make some!” No sooner said than done. Céline got a chair, opened the cupboard, took the bread, cut off a slice, and then very *gravely* recited a *Hail Mary* over it, and then she gave it to me. After making a sign of the Cross I would eat it with *great devotion*, finding it *tasted* the same as the *blessed bread*.

We carried on *spiritual conferences* together frequently. Here is a sample taken from one of Mama’s letters: “Our two little dears, Céline and Thérèse, are angels of benediction, little cherubs. Thérèse is the joy and happiness of Marie and even her glory; it’s incredible how proud she is of her. It’s true she has very rare answers for one her age; she surpasses Céline in this who is twice her age. Céline said the other day: ‘How is it that God can be present in a small host?’ The little one said: ‘That is not surprising, God is all powerful.’ ‘What does all powerful mean?’ ‘It means He can do what He wants!’”²³

One day, Léonie, thinking she was too big to be playing any longer with dolls, came to us with a basket filled with dresses and pretty pieces for making others; her doll was resting on top. “Here, my little sisters, *choose*; I’m giving you all this.” Céline stretched out her hand and took a little ball of wool that pleased her. After a moment’s reflection, I stretched out mine saying: “I choose all!” and I took the basket without further ceremony. Those who witnessed the scene saw nothing

22. “An expression my Father used” (note of Mother Agnes).

23. Letter of Mme. Martin to Pauline, May 10, 1877.

wrong and even Céline herself didn't dream of complaining (besides, she had all sorts of toys, her godfather gave her lots of presents, and Louise found ways of getting her everything she desired).

This little incident of my childhood is a summary of my whole life; later on when perfection was set before me, I understood that to become a *saint* one had to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect thing to do, and forget self. I understood, too, there were many degrees of perfection and each soul was free to respond to the advances of Our Lord, to do little or much for Him, in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices He was asking. Then, as in the days of my childhood, I cried out: "My God 'I choose all!' I don't want to be a *saint by halves*, I'm not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my *own will*; so take it, for 'I choose all' that You will!"

I must stop now. I must speak to you no longer about my infancy but of the little four-year-old Rascal. I remember a dream I must have had around that age and it is still deeply imprinted on my imagination. I dreamed one night I went to take a walk all alone in the garden. When I reached the foot of the steps leading to the garden and which have to be climbed to get into it, I stopped, seized with fright. In front of me, near the arbor, there was a barrel of lime and on this barrel two *frightful little devils* were dancing with surprising agility in spite of the flatirons they had on their feet. All of a sudden they cast fiery glances at me and at the same moment appeared to be more frightened than I was, for they jumped from the barrel and went to hide in the laundry that was just opposite. Seeing they weren't so brave, I wanted to know what they were going to do, and I went up to the window. The poor little devils were there, running on the tables, not knowing what to do to hide from my gaze. Sometimes they approached the window, looking out to see if I was still there and seeing me there they began running like madmen. This dream, I suppose, has nothing extraordinary about it, and still I believe God permitted me to remember it in order to prove to me that a soul in the state of grace has nothing to fear from demons who are cowards, capable of fleeing before the gaze of a little child!

Here's another passage I find in Mama's letters. This poor little Mother evidently had a presentiment that the end of her exile was near.²⁴ "The little ones don't disturb me since both of them are very good; they are very special, and certainly will turn out well. You and Marie will be able to raise them perfectly. Céline never commits the smallest deliberate fault. The little one will be all right too, for she wouldn't tell a lie for all the gold in the world and she has a spirit about her that I have not seen in any of you."²⁵

"The other day she was at the grocery store with Céline and Louise. She was talking about her practices. She was doing this rather loudly with Céline and the woman in the store said to Louise: 'What does she mean by these little practices? When she's playing in the garden that's all she talks about. Mme. Gaucherin listens at the window trying to understand what this debate about practices means.'

"The little one is our whole happiness. She will be good; one can already see the germ of goodness in her. She speaks only about God and wouldn't miss her prayers for anything. I wish you could see her recite the little poems she learned. Never have I seen anything so cute. She gets the exact expression and tone all by herself. But it is especially when she says: 'Little child with the golden hair, where do you believe God is?' When she comes to the words: 'He is up there in the blue heavens,' she raises her eyes with an angelic expression. It's so beautiful that one doesn't grow tired of asking her to recite it, for there is something heavenly in her face!"²⁶

How happy I really was at that age, dear Mother! I had already begun to enjoy life; virtue had its charming qualities for me, and I was, it seems to me, in the same dispositions then as I am now, enjoying a firm control over my actions.

Ah! how quickly those sunny years passed by, those years of my childhood, but what a sweet imprint they have left on my soul! I recall

24. Her sickness, cancerous in nature, appeared for the first time in 1865 in a mild form; it got worse in 1876.

25. Letter to Pauline, March 22, 1877.

26. Letter of March 4, 1877. In the original French, the actual words of the poem are: "Petit enfant à tête blonde, où crois-tu [donc] qu'est le bon Dieu?" "Il est là-haut dans le Ciel bleu."

the days Papa used to bring us to the *pavilion*²⁷; the smallest details are impressed in my heart. I recall especially the Sunday walks when Mama used to accompany us. I still feel the profound and *poetic* impressions that were born in my soul at the sight of fields enamelled with *corn-flowers* and all types of wild flowers. Already I was in love with the *wide open spaces*. Space and the gigantic fir trees, the branches sweeping down to the ground, left in my heart an impression similar to the one I experience still today at the sight of nature.

We frequently met poor people on these long walks, and it was always little Thérèse who was put in charge of bringing them alms, which made her quite happy. Very often Papa, finding the walk too long for his little Queen, brought her back to the house before the others (which displeased her very much). And to console her, Céline filled her pretty little basket with daisies and gave them to her when she got back; but alas! grandmother²⁸ found her granddaughter had too many, so she took a large part of them for her statue of the Blessed Virgin. This didn't please little Thérèse, but she kept from saying anything, having got into the habit of not complaining ever, even when they took what belonged to her or when she was accused unjustly. She preferred to be silent and not excuse herself. There was no merit here but natural virtue. What a shame that this good inspiration has vanished!

Oh! everything truly smiled upon me on this earth: I found flowers under each of my steps and my happy disposition contributed much to making life pleasant, but a new period was about to commence for my soul. I had to pass through the crucible of trial and to suffer from my childhood in order to be offered earlier to Jesus. Just as the flowers of spring begin to grow under the snow and to expand in the first rays of the sun, so the little flower whose memories I am writing had to pass through the winter of trial.

27. The Pavilion was a small piece of property acquired by M. Martin before his marriage, on Rue des Lavois (today called Rue du Pavillon Sainte-Thérèse).

28. M. Martin's mother, who frequently visited on Sunday.

