LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A RETREAT GUIDE ON ST. THÉRÈSE'S LITTLE WAY OF CHARITY

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This booklet is a part of RCSpirituality's *Retreat Guide* service, which includes free online videos and audio tracks available at **RCSpirituality.org**.

INTRODUCTION

Love One Another

RETREAT OVERVIEW

What is a defining characteristic of a Christian? The citizens of the Roman Empire had already noticed it by the early third century AD when they exclaimed about Christians, "See how they love each other!"

Christ's great commandment is that we love one another as he has loved us. Inasmuch as we live that out, we are Christians in name and in fact. But we encounter an obstacle: our own weakness and sinfulness.

Luckily, God has given us the saints, friends who can guide us along the narrow path that leads to eternal life. St. Thérèse of Lisieux is such a friend.

St. Therese is a Doctor of the Church and, yet, wrote with simplicity. She boldly proclaimed, "In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will BE LOVE!" At the same time, she was keenly aware of her own weakness and absolute reliance on God's grace. She was strong-willed and sensitive, but, by the end of her brief life, she radiated such exquisite kindness and love that even the prickliest sisters in her Carmelite convent felt loved by her.

St. Thérèse offers us a Little Way of Love which we can follow no matter where we are in our spiritual journey. And in this Retreat Guide, *Love One Another*, we will explore that Little Way in the following stages:

- In the First Meditation, we will reflect on the background of St. Thérèse's Little Way and how it fits in with our call to holiness, which means greatness in love.

- In the Second Meditation, we will delve into Christ's great commandment to love one another as he has loved us.

- In the Conference, we will unite the two meditations by looking at how St. Thérèse lived that great commandment in her own life, and we will draw out some practical conclusions.

Let's begin by turning to the Holy Spirit in the quiet of our souls, asking him to set our hearts on fire with love for Christ and for others in this Retreat.

NOTES

FIRST MEDITATION

Love's Little Way

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INTRODUCTION

Holiness can seem complicated sometimes. Do we choose this prayer or that prayer? Do we focus on this virtue or that virtue? We want to be holy, but why does it seem that as the years go by we become more aware of our own weakness?

And yet we are all called to holiness. As *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, puts it,

> All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of all things. … They must follow in his footsteps and conform themselves to his image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor.
>
> —*Lumen Gentium*, 40

So there is a double dimension to holiness: to love God above all else and to love and serve others.

With all that in mind, let's begin our journey. With grace, insight, and exquisite sensitivity, St. Thérèse was a living manifestation of holiness. With trust and gratitude, we seek to learn from her example. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Pray for Us!

BACKGROUND

Thérèse Martin was born in 1873 in France, and, although she died at age 24, she sparked a revolution. French spirituality at the time was laced with residual Jansenism, which obscured the true meaning of holiness. Jansenism essentially denied human freedom and said that we are incapable of fulfilling some of God's commandments and that our freedom is only external. It also held that Christ did not die for all.

Such a spirituality resulted in an overemphasis on God's justice separated from his mercy. This flowed into a prescription spirituality: external devotions multiplied, and it became easy to forget that the center of Christianity is Christ's commandment to love, which he gives us the grace to fulfill.

But Thérèse Martin's experience of God was different. Her parents, Louis and Zelie, taught their five daughters to relate to God as a loving Father and to carry that over into their love for others. Louis and Zelie exemplified this in their own lives; in fact on October 18, 2015, Pope Francis canonized them saints.

For example, St. Thérèse's older sisters described how in 1876 their parents met a homeless man on the street as they returned from Mass. They brought him home, fed him, and cared for him until they could find a place for him in the 19th century equivalent of a homeless shelter.

Though she had a spiritually-privileged upbringing, the future saint did not have an easy life. Her life was marked by loss: the death of her mother when Thérèse was 4 years old, the departure of her older sister for the

convent a few years later, her father's progressive mental deterioration after she entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux in 1888, and the tuberculosis which would claim her own life. The last 18 months before her death at the age of 24 were wracked by physical pain and terrifying temptations to despair. But the words on her lips when she died on September 30, 1897, were "My God, I love you!"

Her life reminds us that we are all called to holiness, which means union with God and others in love. And St. Thérèse offers us a path towards this union which anyone, no matter how weak and imperfect, can safely follow.

HOLINESS

In her autobiography *Story of a Soul*, which was published a year after her death and is now translated into over 50 languages, St. Thérèse offers the following insight.

> I wondered for a long time … why all souls don't receive an equal amount of grace … Jesus answered me … I understood how all the flowers he has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and 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 …

She continues:

> 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 also 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 …

And she concludes by saying:

> Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on the 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. Perfection consists in being what God wills us to be.

Perfection (or, we would say, holiness) consists in being what God wills us to be. That clears the air. Holiness is for each one of us. It simply means being what God wills us to be. And God wills us to be united to him in love and to love one another as he has loved us.

AN ELEVATOR

But St. Thérèse also realized how weak she was. It is one thing to want to be what God wills us to be; it is something else to actually be that.

In *Story of a Soul* she wrote:

> I have always wanted to be a saint. But when I compare myself to the saints, I seem like a grain of sand next to a lofty mountain, so tall that its summit is lost in the clouds.

She goes on to affirm though:

> But I don't get discouraged. I say to myself: God does not inspire desires that cannot be fulfilled. In spite of my littleness, I can aspire to holiness. I must put up with myself as I am, with all my imperfections. But I want to find a way to go to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight and very short …

And so she turned to a simple image for help. In 1888 she visited Paris and saw an elevator there. It remained in her mind and led her to desire a spiritual elevator that would lift her swiftly and surely to God. That elevator was the arms of God. She said that we must admit our weakness to God and let him carry us, and then we will be safely traveling on the elevator to holiness.

What is our part after we have done that? Not to jump off the elevator. How do we stay on the elevator? By the way we love each other.

When St. John Paul II named St. Thérèse a Doctor of the Church in 1997, he spoke about the "disarming simplicity of the Little Way which, by returning to the essentials, leads to the secret of all life: the Divine Love that surrounds and penetrates every human venture."

His words reflect St. Thérèse's great affirmation in *Story of a Soul*, when she joyfully proclaims:

> I understood that Love embraces all vocations, that Love is all things, that it embraces all times and all places … in a word, that it is eternal! … I cried out … I have found my vocation, 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 will Be Love!"

In the next Meditation we will dig into Christ's great commandment—love one another as I have loved you—but now let's take some time to reflect on our own call to holiness in love. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What does holiness mean to me?

2. In what ways have I experienced the call to be holy? How would I describe that call?

3. Where is it most difficult for me to allow God to be the elevator that St. Thérèse describes? How does God want to help me to accept his action in my life?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

> You are mistaken … if you believe that … Thérèse walks always with fervor on the road of virtue. She is weak … very weak, and every day she has a new experience of this weakness, but, Marie, Jesus is pleased to teach her, as He did to St. Paul, the science of rejoicing in her infirmities. This is a great grace, and I beg Jesus to teach it to you …
>
> —St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
> Letter to her cousin, Marie

When Jesus said, "Give me to drink," it was the love of His poor creature the Creator of the Universe was seeking. He was thirsty for love. Ah! I feel it more than ever before, Jesus is parched, for He meets only the ungrateful and indifferent among His disciples in the world … alas, He finds few hearts who surrender to Him without reservations, who understand the real tenderness of His infinite Love.

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
Letter to her sister, Celine

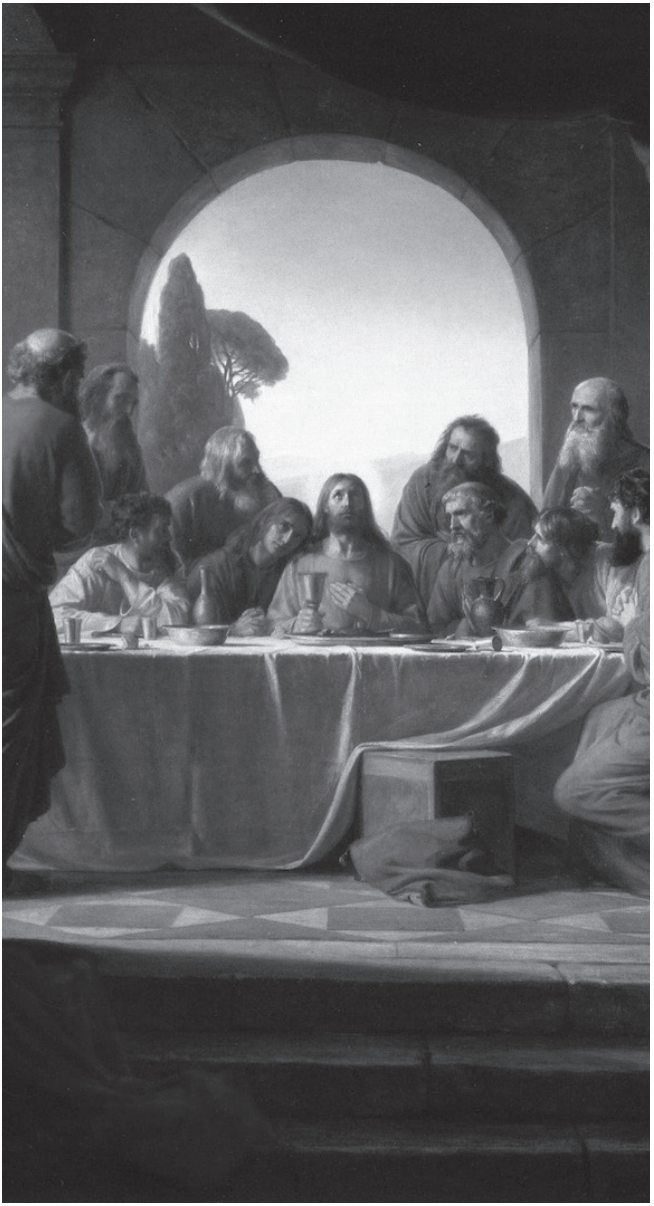
Living on Love is keeping within oneself
A great treasure in an earthen vase.
My Beloved, my weakness is extreme.
Ah, I'm far from being an angel from heaven! …
But if I fall with each passing hour,
You come to my aid, lifting me up.
At each moment you give me your grace:
I live on Love.

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
"Living on Love"

NOTES

SECOND MEDITATION

Love One Another as I Have Loved You



INTRODUCTION

The core of Jesus's discourse to his closest followers during the Last Supper was about love. He told them:

> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you … You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.
>
> —John 15:9–17

SETTING THE STAGE

Let's imagine we are there in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. It is night, and the only light comes from the flickering flame of torches and candles. The air outside is still cold, but within there is a sense of warmth and closeness among the Apostles and Jesus—and there's something more. An air of expectation fills the room. Everyone knows that something is looming, but no one other than Jesus has the courage to speak of the gathering storm.

Look at the Apostles' faces. Each one is so different, and yet each one is loved and chosen by the Lord. Each one, in his own way, loves Jesus in return. One of them is missing: Judas has already gone out to sell Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

All of them look at Jesus, so your gaze naturally follows theirs. Jesus is speaking. Imagine the look on his face as he offers his last will and testament to his apostles—and to you. Imagine the conviction his words carried that night. In Shakespeare's Richard II, the dying John of Gaunt observes, "Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain." All Christ's words breathe truth—as Psalm 45 puts it, grace is poured upon his lips—but tonight his words have an ever-deeper ring to them.

AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU

Ever since that sorry day in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve hid from God, we have been tempted to doubt the Father's love for us. And so holiness, to paraphrase Pope Benedict XVI, in the first place means letting God love us.

What do Christ's words mean? He is the Eternal Son of the Father. The Father gives the Son everything except his Fatherhood: God loves the Son with an infinite love. A million years would not be enough to even begin to appreciate how much the Father loves the Son in his eternal, infinite love.

Imagine you are standing at the base of a mountain in the Rockies. It towers above you, but with binoculars you can just spot a bird circling around the peak. Suddenly the bird swoops down and scoops up a bit of dirt in its beak and flies away. Now imagine if every hundred years, one of that bird's descendents were to return and take away another bit of dirt. How long would it take to remove the entire mountain? It is unimaginable. And yet when that mountain is gone, eternity is just beginning.

The Father loves the Son with an eternal love. And Christ loves us with that same eternal, infinite love. Sometimes we put the cart before the horse and forget that we can only be holy because we are first loved; we can only love because we are infinitely loved by Christ.

Then Christ tells us, "Abide in my love." The verb in Greek is meno, which John uses to indicate a deep union. Jesus reminds us that we have a part to play in abiding in this union. We don't earn it—it's a gift—but God does ask us to create space for this union to abide and deepen. (Which, by the way, is exactly what a retreat like this helps us to do.)

KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS

Christ goes on to give us a special prescription for abiding in his love. "Keep my commandments." The word "commandment" falls strangely on our modern ears. We tend to see it as a tyrannical and arbitrary whim, and we forget that God's commandments are aimed at our happiness: if we keep them, we flourish. And all the commandments are summed up in one word: Love.

St. Thérèse put it like this: "I know of no other means to reach holiness than by love. To love, how perfectly our hearts are made for this! Sometimes I look for another word to use, but in this land of exile nothing else expresses so well the vibrations of our soul. Hence we must keep to that one word: Love."

In our own lives, it is easy to get bogged down with worry about how we can best serve God. And so Christ is going to make it clear for us with his new commandment.

THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." These words of Jesus pierce like swords and burn like cold iron. Christ's commandment is unique in the annals of human history, and it calls us to the greatness we have always longed for.

If we reach the end of our lives with opulent houses on three continents, a huge portfolio, lavish vacations at the drop of a hat, but do not have love, we will find ourselves entirely empty. As St. Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 13, if we have all the spiritual gifts imaginable but do not have love, we're just empty gongs ringing a melancholy tune to an audience of one. But if we die rich in love, even if we have nothing else we will possess all things in Christ.

But can God command someone to love? Pope Benedict XVI said that love can be commanded because it has first been given. St. Thérèse offers us an image of the love of God given to her in Christ, and that same love is given to each of us. When she was 14 years old something struck her while looking at a picture of Jesus on the Cross. In her own words, here is what happened next.

> I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling on the ground without anyone´s hastening to gather it up … The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: "I thirst!" These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls.

That conviction and that desire were not meant for St. Thérèse alone. Christ wants to give that same conviction and that same desire to every Christian.

CONCLUSION: LAYING DOWN YOUR LIFE

Finally, Christ spells out for us what love truly means, when he says: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In a few hours, Jesus was going to seal these words in his own blood on the Cross. On the Cross, He gave His life for you and for me, and He invites us to that same heroism in love.

If we are normal, that probably seems daunting. Maybe saints can love that way, but how can the rest of us mere mortals ever aspire to such heights? But remember the point in the first meditation about the universal call to holiness: we are all supposed to become saints. St. Thérèse's Little Way reminds us that if we trust in God, He will give us the strength to lay down our lives for others.

St. Thérèse has this helpful reflection about our ability to love to the end.

> Lord, I know that *you don't command the impossible*. You know better than I do my weakness. You know that I could never love my sisters as you love them, unless you, oh my Jesus, loved them in me. I love your new commandment since it gives me the assurance that your will is to love in me all those you command me to love!

Every command from God is above all a promise. Every call from God is above all a promise. It is a promise that He will be with us. It is a promise that He will give us the strength that we need to lay down our lives in love.

In the Conference, we will look at how this new commandment to love by laying down our lives played out in St. Thérèse's everyday life. But for now, let's take a few moments to speak with Our Lord about his words "Love one another as I have loved you." The following questions and quotations may help your mediation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do I want to thank Jesus for the gift of His love?

2. In what ways do I sense the Lord is asking me to allow His love into my life?

3. Where could God be asking me to lay down my life for someone else? In what ways do I need to trust Him more in order to do that?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

Jesus made Himself poor that we might be able to give him love. He holds out His hand to us like a beggar so that on the radiant day of judgment when He will appear in His glory, He may have us hear those sweet words: "Come, blessed of my Father, for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink …" It is Jesus Himself who spoke those words; it is He who wants our love, who begs for it … He places Himself, so to speak, at our mercy.

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
Letter to her sister, Celine

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cared nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

—John 10:11–15
RSVCE

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children,

let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassures our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.

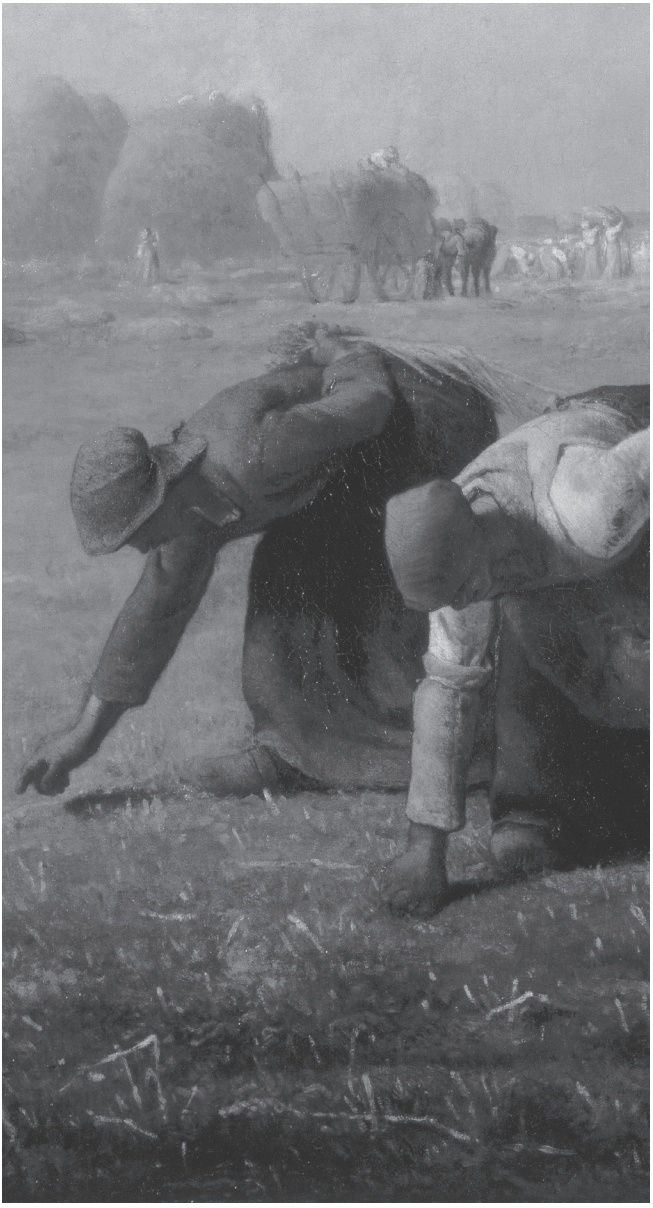
Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do whatever pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them.

—1 John 3:16–24
RSVCE

NOTES

CONFERENCE

Everyday Love



The Gleaners (cropped)

INTRODUCTION

In the mid 19th century, a number of French painters decided to experiment with a more realistic style of art. They wanted to explore the drama of everyday life in ordinary settings with ordinary people. One of the most prominent of these painters was Francois Millet.

His painting *The Gleaners* ties together some of the meditations' most important points and offers a bridge to the conference we are about to begin.

- First of all, the very ordinariness of the scene is striking. For St. Thérèse, holiness lived out in the great commandment to love consists in doing ordinary things with extraordinary love. The three women in the painting follow the harvesters to glean the residual wheat. The labor is backbreaking; the payoff is minimal. There seems to be little transcendence in what they are doing, yet if done out of love, their ordinary actions have eternal value.

- Secondly, although Millet doesn't include it in the painting, it is safe to assume that these women are gleaning in order to feed their families. Remember Christ's great commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you …" This love means laying down our lives for others, and that takes place precisely in the little details of everyday life. It is easy to fall into the trap of waiting for extraordinary moments to love. St. Thérèse would want to tell us that we need to love right now. We need to lay down our lives for others right now. In fact, St. Thérèse's namesake, St. Theresa of Avila, wrote that a favorite trick of the Devil is to encourage us to dream about the great

things we can do for God and others tomorrow and to ignore the little things we can do today.

So how did St. Thérèse live the great commandment to love in the details of everyday life? Here are two coordinates that help us to better understand this great commandment and to live it out in our own lives.

ORDINARY THINGS WITH EXTRAORDINARY LOVE

The first coordinate is to do ordinary things with extraordinary love. Since we are speaking about the great commandment to love one another, we will focus specifically on how St. Thérèse learned to lay down her life for others in ways we can all imitate.

For example she described how the other sisters used to leave their mantles strewn around the chapel after they prayed the Divine Office. The winters in Normandy are bitter, and the convent in Lisieux only had heat in one room, so these mantles were a vital part of the nuns' wardrobe. St. Thérèse wanted to ensure that they were ready to use when the sisters returned, so, after everyone was gone, she would fold up each mantle and leave it in its owner's seat. No one ever knew who did this loving action, but there were doubtless some grateful nuns in that cold chapel! As St. Thérèse put it, "I loved to fold up the mantles forgotten by the Sisters and to do all sorts of little services for them."

Another little service she rendered was to clean out the spider-infested pantry under the staircase. Despite her intense dislike of spiders, she wanted to make this sacrifice so others wouldn't have to.

This same love led St. Thérèse to lay down her life by checking her impatience. And those of us who struggle with impatience know that this can truly feel like martyrdom. The smallest things can irritate us, and they are often habits the other person is not even aware of or may not be able to change.

The Clicking Sister is a good example of that point. This nun had dentures that fit poorly, and she constantly clicked her teeth together in the chapel. To make matters worse, she also fidgeted with the rosary the Carmelites wear on their belts. St. Thérèse had very sensitive hearing, and these trifles were a source of constant irritation. But pay attention to the choice she made. She decided to offer these irritations to God, and thereby chose to love this sister in spite of her annoying idiosyncrasies.

THOSE WE LIKE THE LEAST

The second coordinate in St. Thérèse's journey towards loving others as Christ loved her is loving those we like the least. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells us: "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and St. Thérèse gives us a wonderful example of how to do this.

As she meditated on Christ's new commandment to love one another as he has loved us, with a love that brings us to lay down our lives for others, a realization struck her.

> I understood how imperfect was my love for my sisters. I saw that I didn't love them as God loves them … I understand now that charity consists in bearing with others' faults, in not being surprised at

> their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice. But I understood above all that charity must not remain hidden at the bottom of the heart.

And buoyed by this conviction, her efforts to receive and correspond with God's grace bore fruit and St. Thérèse grew in her ability to love. Two examples from *Story of a Soul* stand out.

The first is Sister St. Pierre. She was the oldest nun in the convent in Lisieux; St. Thérèse was the youngest. Sister Saint Pierre was crippled by arthritis, and the pain did little to improve her naturally irascible temper. Since she was unable to walk without help, one of the nuns was assigned to assist her passage from the chapel to the dining room after Vespers each evening. St. Thérèse volunteered for this role and described what followed:

> It cost me very much to offer myself for this service because I knew it was not easy to please Sister St. Pierre … Each evening when I saw her shake her hourglass I knew what this meant: Let's go! It's incredible how difficult it was for me to get up, especially at the beginning, however I did it immediately, and then a ritual was set in motion.

St. Thérèse went on to explain the ordeal of getting this cantankerous sister down the hallway to the dining room. "And then the walk took place." She had to follow Sister St. Pierre and hold on to her belt to prevent her from falling; however the elderly nun was convinced that Thérèse was about to let her fall, and would say: "Ah, my God! You're going too fast; I'm going to break something." If Thérèse slowed down Sister St. Pierre

would exclaim: "Well, come on! I don't feel your hand; you've let me go and I'm going to fall! I was right when I said you were too young to help me."

When they finally reached the dining room, Thérèse would help Sister St. Pierre get seated, and then she was free to leave. But she noticed that Sister St. Pierre's arthritis impeded her efforts to eat her bread, so Thérèse began to cut up the bread before she left. "As she had not asked for this, she was touched by my attention, and it was by this means that I gained her good graces." And St. Thérèse learned later that Sister St. Pierre was especially grateful because, before she left, St. Thérèse would flash "her most beautiful smile."

The second example is St. Thérèse's heroic love for a sister in the convent who, as she put it, had the "faculty of displeasing me in almost everything, in her ways, her words, her character, everything seems very disagreeable to me." Perhaps many of us know someone like that too. But St. Thérèse didn't stop at this natural antipathy. She set to work loving this nun the way she would love the person she liked the most. God doesn't ask us to like everyone, since our spontaneous feelings are beyond our control. He does, however, ask us to love each person and to show that by choosing their good in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Thérèse explained how she prayed for this sister each time she saw her. She also tried to serve her in every way possible, and when tempted to snap at her she, tried to give her most agreeable smile and change the subject. At the same time, Thérèse was realistic. St. Philip Neri said that when it comes to temptations against chastity, "cowards win." In other words, sometimes it is best to

simply run away from the temptation, and that also goes for charity. Thérèse tells us: "Frequently … I used to run away like a deserter whenever my struggles [to not respond harshly to this sister] became too violent."

St. Thérèse's efforts to make this sister feel loved paid off, and one day she asked Thérèse: "What attracts you so much towards me? Every time you look at me I see you smile." St. Thérèse concluded that "what attracted me was Jesus, hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus, who makes sweet what is most bitter."

CONCLUSION: SOME PRACTICAL TAKE-AWAYS

Now let's pull out a few practical applications for our own lives.

- The first is prayer. God calls us to be saints. A saint is someone who is increasingly united with God and loves others to the point of laying down his life for them, and this is simply impossible without prayer. We need a set time for personal prayer *every day*. This time is, as St. Thérèse put it, when we allow our hearts to surge towards God and become a cry of recognition and love. In that prayer, we can tailor St. Thérèse's words to our own circumstances. "Lord, I know that you don't command the impossible … You know that I could never love my husband (or my wife) and my children as you love them, unless you, Jesus, loved them." God does not play games with us, and if Christ commands us to love others as he has loved us, it is because he wants to love them in and through us.

- The second is Sacred Scripture. St. Thérèse's writings are filled with references to Sacred Scripture, and her soul vibrated with the Word of God. Did you know that if you dedicate just 12–15 minutes a day to reading your Bible that you will finish the whole thing in a year? The Bible is God's love letter to us, and He wants us to read it. In the recommended reading list, you will find a book that can help us to delve deeper into it.

- And final item is action. Laying down our lives for others is not complicated. Whenever we perform ordinary actions with extraordinary love, such as cleaning the house or taking out the trash or listening when we feel like interrupting, we are laying down our lives for others. We need to be patient: we are not always going to *feel* extraordinary love, but it is enough to choose the good of the other person and try to carry that out.

Hopefully this retreat with St. Thérèse has strengthened your desire for holiness, and your confidence that God is calling you to be great saints in the extraordinariness of the ordinary. Let's continue to ask St. Thérèse to pray for us as we allow Christ's love to fill our hearts and to impel us to love others as he has loved us.

The following questions may help you discern what attitudes and practical resolutions Our Lord is inspiring in your heart.

PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is on my heart as I conclude this retreat?

2. In what ways has the Lord consoled me or challenged me?

3. How does the Lord want to help me to grow in my conviction that his commands are above all a promise?

4. Who is my *Sister St. Pierre*? In other words, who is that person I know the Lord is asking me to love and lay down my life for?

5. In what ways can I love the person I like the least?

6. List two or three practical resolutions from this retreat. For example, I will read one of the recommended books. I will choose one practical way to show my love for someone I may not like all that much. I will make a novena to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, asking her to pray for me so I grow in my love. Each week I will pick one ordinary household duty and intentionally offer it up for my family.

NOTES

FURTHER READING

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux
translation by Fr. John Clarke

My Vocation Is Love
by Jean LaFrance

Everything Is Grace
by Joseph Schmidt

The Better Part
by Fr. John Bartunek, LC

Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible
by Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins

EXPLORING MORE

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