

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

The Way of Love

by Mary
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O CRUX
ANIMAE
SPES CARME

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THE LITTLE QUEEN

Thirteen-year-old Marie Martin and her eleven-year-old sister Pauline couldn't sleep. Their mother was in her room having her ninth child.

"Marie," whispered Pauline, "do you think the baby will be a boy or a girl?"

Marie sat up. "I hope it's a boy," she replied. "Papa loves us four girls, but a boy would go fishing with him. On the other hand, Mama said she wants another girl like Thérèse." The last baby, Thérèse, had died shortly after birth. Three other Martin children had also died.

"Boy or girl, I just hope this baby lives," Pauline sighed.

"You know," mused Marie, "if Mama and Papa hadn't married, none of us would be here. They both wanted to join religious communities, but it didn't work out."

"I know the story," said Pauline, leaning on her elbow. "Mama met Papa on the bridge and knew he was the one for her. She was twenty-six and he was thirty-five. She

made and sold lace, and he was a watchmaker and jeweler. Mama convinced him that they were meant for each other. They got married and lived happily ever after . . . with us!"

"Yes, with us!" agreed Marie. After a few moments she added, "Too bad the baby didn't come yesterday, on New Year's Day."

"It doesn't matter, Marie. Our new little brother or sister is going to *make* our life new!"

"You're right about that," Marie whispered excitedly. "And I'm going to be the godmother! I wonder what the baby will be like?"

"I'm sure that your godchild will be as good as Mama and Papa. How many other couples get up early every morning to go to Mass? Don't worry!"

"Pauline, do you think the baby will be dark like us and Celine, or fair like Leonie?"

"We'll soon find out."

"Well, we'd better get to sleep, or we won't be our best to meet our brother or sister in the morning. Good night, Pauline."

"Good night, Marie."

A little before midnight Louis Martin entered the older girls' room. "Pauline, Marie," he gently called. "Wake up."

"Is the baby here, Papa?" Pauline sleepily asked.

"Yes!" Mr. Martin whispered happily. "You have a sister. We're going to name her Marie-Francoise-Thérèse, but we'll call her Thérèse. Your mother's fine. You can visit them both in the morning." Before the girls could squeal in excitement, Mr. Martin put his finger to his lips. "Shh," he cautioned. "We don't want to wake your two little sisters. They'll find out tomorrow. Now go back to sleep." He pulled the blankets up over his oldest daughters, kissed them, and tiptoed out.

On January 4, 1873, Thérèse was taken through the snow to be baptized at the Church of Notre Dame. She was clothed in the beautiful lace garment her mother had made. Then Thérèse was brought back to her home in the town of Alençon, which is in Normandy, northern France.

But Mr. and Mrs. Martin's happiness soon turned to concern. Several weeks after her birth, Thérèse became sick. Mrs. Martin couldn't nurse her to give her the milk she needed. One morning while Mr. Martin was on a trip, Mrs. Martin walked two miles to Rose Taille's house. When Mrs. Taille opened the door, Mrs. Martin begged, "Rose, please

come! My baby is very sick. Would you nurse her as you did my two boys? Please?"

Mrs. Taille's husband appeared in the doorway. "Zelie," he said, "you know that Rose has children of her own. She can't go with you. I'm sorry."

"But Thérèse will die without her help!" Mrs. Martin pleaded.

"I'll come at once," said Mrs. Taille quietly.

By the time the women reached the Martin home, Thérèse looked lifeless. Mrs. Taille took her little body into her arms to feed her, while Mrs. Martin, crying, ran to her room to pray. When Mrs. Martin returned, Thérèse had drunk a little milk but was unconscious. She was so pale that her mother thought she had died. Suddenly the baby opened her eyes and smiled.

"This one will live, Zelie!" Mrs. Taille exclaimed. "I'll see to it."

Mrs. Taille took Thérèse into her home and fed her for fifteen months. When she worked in the fields, she put Thérèse in a wheelbarrow lined with hay. Sometimes Mrs. Taille tied Thérèse onto the back of Red Lady, her cow (so named because of the dark red spots on its white coat). Finally

Thérèse was healthy enough to go back to her own mother.

When Thérèse returned to her family, she was a sturdy, happy child, who talked, laughed, and ran about. Mrs. Martin wrote to her brother Isidore in Lisieux and to Marie and Pauline at boarding school: "Thérèse is a little imp. When she says 'no' nothing can make her give in. 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." With her blond curls, merry gray eyes, and constant smile, Thérèse was the darling of the Martin family, especially of her father.

Mr. Martin nicknamed his girls. Marie was Diamond, Pauline was Lovely Pearl, Leonie was Brave Lady, and Celine was Valiant Lady. Thérèse he called Little Queen. Mr. Martin hung a swing in the yard. Tied onto it, Thérèse demanded, "Higher! Higher!" Another of her favorite activities was to sit on her father's boot as he walked around the house and garden. After Mr. Martin bought a small house with a large garden, the children enjoyed going there. Best of all Thérèse loved their Sunday walks. Her mother didn't work that day and joined

them. On these walks they saw wheat fields, trees, and various flowers. Nature fascinated Thérèse and lifted her heart to God.

Surrounded by the love of her parents and sisters, Thérèse loved them fiercely in return. She was particularly fond of Celine, who was three years older. Thérèse couldn't bear to be separated from her.

Thérèse also had a special love for Pauline, whom people said would become a nun. Thérèse didn't know what that meant, but she told herself, *Then I will be a nun, too.*

One day Marie brought a string of beads home from school. "Look," she said to six-year-old Celine, "my teacher gave us these to help us do good deeds. Whenever you do something kind, or make a sacrifice—something that's hard for you—you push up a bead."

"Let me see," said Thérèse. She watched Marie push up a bead.

"When you practice self-control, like giving in to someone else during a game," Marie explained, "you keep track on these beads. Here, Celine, these are for you," Marie said, handing her the beads.

Always trying to imitate Celine, Thérèse broke in, "I want beads, too!" Marie drew another set from her pocket. "I brought

beads for both of you," she said with a smile.

Thérèse kept her virtue beads in her pocket. She and Celine raced to see who would have the most beads up each day. Thérèse, who had temper tantrums, now practiced self-control. She usually won the bead contests.

Although only three years old, Thérèse had a sensitive conscience. If she misbehaved, the house echoed with her sobs. She quickly told on herself and asked forgiveness. An intelligent girl, Thérèse began to read at this age.

In May Mrs. Martin turned a room into a chapel and set her statue of Mary in it. Thérèse delighted in decorating it with flowers. One Sunday she had gathered flowers on the family walk. On her way to put them in the little chapel, she met her grandmother.

"Hello, Thérèse, did you have a nice walk?" her grandmother asked.

"Oh, yes, Grandmother," Thérèse replied.

"What pretty flowers you have there," remarked her grandmother.

"I picked them myself," said Thérèse proudly.

"I would like to have those flowers for my May altar," her grandmother remarked. "Would you give them to me as a present?"

Thérèse looked startled. Then she nodded. One by one she plucked the flowers out of her bouquet and handed them over. When they were all gone, Celine saw tears in Thérèse's eyes.

"Thank you, dear," said Thérèse's grandmother, and she left with the bouquet.

The Martin house was a happy place for Thérèse in those days. Her mother ran her lace-making business from home. It became so successful that Mr. Martin sold his own watch repair business in order to manage his wife's affairs. The Martins were a good, well-to-do Catholic family. It seemed that they had no problems.

But sorrow was about to enter the picture.