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# Between Friends

A publication for the Friends of the Society of the Little Flower, Darien, Illinois, and Canada



**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL**

*Graced Moments*

# *Blessed are the Merciful-Graced Moments*



**Rev. Thomas Schrader, O. Carm.**  
Director

## **Dear Friends of St. Thérèse,**

As the Director of the Society of the Little Flower, I am thrilled to present “Blessed are the Merciful-Graced Moments,” a beautiful compilation that celebrates the profound essence of St. Thérèse’s of Lisieux spirituality. This work delves into the transformative power of mercy, encapsulating the gentle yet impactful ways in which St. Thérèse embodied and lived this virtue. It’s a poignant exploration of her life, revealing the grace-filled moments that shaped her into a beacon of compassion and mercy. Through these reflections, readers will be inspired to embrace mercy in their own lives, following in the footsteps of this remarkable saint.

**In the embrace of the Little Flower’s heart,  
Father Tom Schrader, O. Carm. 🌹**

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# THE BEAUTY OF THE *Profound Spiritual World of St. Thérèse*



**Warm greetings to the devoted members of the Society of the Little Flower. It's with great joy that I unveil our latest edition of *Between Friends*.**

“Blessed are the Merciful-Graced Moments” offers a meaningful journey into the profound spiritual world of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, casting a radiant light on the transformative essence of mercy. It stands not just as a testament to our dedicated staff’s unwavering commitment but, more significantly, as a vibrant ode to the profound spirituality that defines St. Thérèse and those who hold her dear.

This became evident during the visitation last fall, where St. Thérèse’s relics, alongside those of her revered parents, Louis and Zélie Martin, were honored. Our staff exhibited

unwavering dedication and fervor, ensuring the resounding success of this monumental occasion. Their tireless efforts highlighted the unity and passion that lie at the heart of the Society of the Little Flower.

Within these pages, immerse yourself in the experiences, challenges, and ultimate triumphs not only of our dedicated team but of all who came to experience such a wonderful and holy event. The Society of the Little Flower staff’s collective efforts enriched many followers, not just during the relics visit, but in the moments in each passing day. This narrative pays homage not only to

their commitment but, more profoundly, to the limitless inspiration drawn from the spiritual legacy of St. Thérèse. Journey through these pages and be uplifted by the remarkable moments steeped in her “Little Way” spirituality.

Mary T Lambert 🌹



**Mary Therese Lambert**  
Editor of *Between Friends*

# CARMELITES

## *You Should Know*



### FATHER CRAIG MORRISON, O. CARM.

Father Craig is a native of Canada who has spent his life in academia, studying and teaching us how to understand the Scripture and learn what St. Thérèse had to learn through her life experience about the mercy and grace of God. He learned that St. Thérèse viewed her life as graced by God and so she lived in constant gratitude for God's many gifts to her. A life of grace, gratitude, and mercy.

He was born and grew up in the city of Niagara Falls, Canada, a region that the Carmelites came to in 1875

and proceeded to establish many of the parishes in the city. So when he thought about life as a priest, when he had attended a high school run by the Holy Cross Fathers, he chose the Carmelites. As he was finishing high school, the Carmelite Parish of St. Patrick's was under the dynamic leadership of Father Joseph O'Brien, O. Carm.. His preaching and his presiding at Mass had a tremendous impact on Craig as a young man. So when he decided for the priesthood, the Carmelite Order was the only path for him.

While in Carmelite formation, before ordination, he was assigned to Salpointe Catholic High School in Tucson, Arizona. It was a wonderful experience of ministry to high school students. He taught juniors—at the cusp of critical thinking and reflection on their faith life. “I discovered during those years that I enjoyed teaching, but what I didn't know, is that I would be teaching for the rest of my life.

“While studying theology, I took a course on the Gospels from Rabbi Haberman, the chief rabbi of the Washington Hebrew congregation. He opened my eyes to a different way of reading the New Testament.” Craig began studying Hebrew with Mrs. Bella Tovey, a survivor of Bergen-Belsen. She and her husband, Henry, a survivor of Auschwitz, would educate him about the Holocaust and the terrible impact the murder of European Jews had on their families.

In Washington, D.C., studying theology, he encountered Father Roland Murphy, O. Carm., one of the greatest biblical scholars of the 20th century. From Father Roland, he learned how a Carmelite could combine the highest levels of academic scholarship with pastoral ministry and preaching. Eventually, Father Craig would be assigned to Rome to study at the

Pontifical Biblical Institute. Early on in Greek classes, he was given the key resource for reading the Greek New Testament, a very technical grammatical analysis of every word in the Greek New Testament.

To his great surprise, when he opened the cover of the resource book, he saw the words of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: “If I had been a priest, I should have made a thorough study of Hebrew and Greek, so as to understand the thought of God as he has vouchsafed to express it in our human language.” Despite only having a limited academic education, her insight has guided Father Craig's own study of the word of God for years. He explained: “I am always conscious of the grace that has been afforded me to allow me to read the “thought of God,” as Thérèse put it, in its original language.”

Thérèse, a Doctor of the Church, also recognized that the revelation of God in the Bible is expressed in human language. Her prophetic insight would receive much further study in the theology of the Post-Vatican II Church. Fr Craig explained: “I have been graced with the opportunity to fulfill St. Therese's dream by learning to read the Bible in its original languages, in Hebrew and Greek. Today, I teach young scholars these biblical languages and work in the areas of biblical translations and the preparation of a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible that will be used by translators who will transmit God's word into the languages of the world.”

He continued: “At my school, the Pontifical Biblical

Institute, we have students from over 70 countries. St. Thérèse wanted to be a missionary, and our sister school here in Rome, the Pontifical Oriental Institute, is under her patronage. I think she would be happy that a Carmelite is preparing future biblical scholars, some of whom are missionaries, to teach the Bible in seminaries around the world.”

In her autobiography, Thérèse reveals her deep knowledge of the Bible and her example encourages us to know the Bible like she does. When she was in need of spiritual food, Sacred Scripture was her nourishment. She found in it, she wrote, “hidden manna, a pure and substantial food. But, above all, the Gospels help me in my prayers. They are always showing me new ways of looking at things.” How true! The reading of the Bible helps us see the world in new ways.

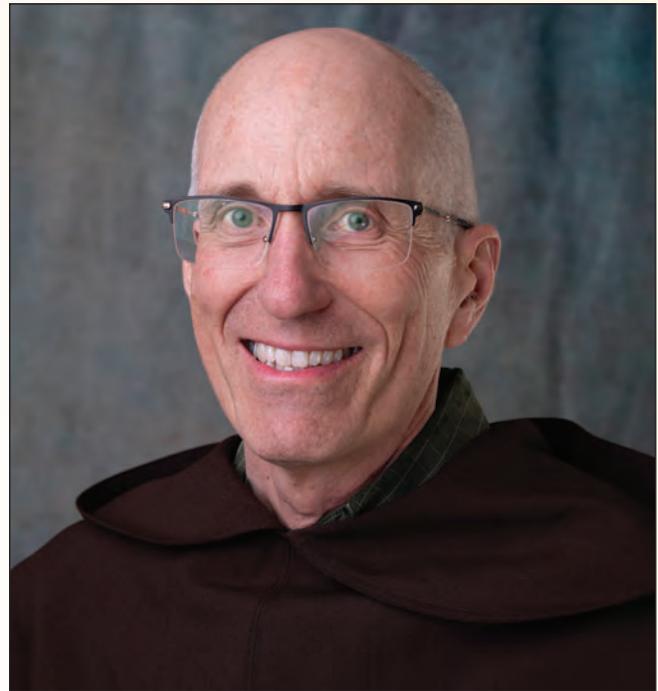
Like Thérèse, we come to see the world with the mind of Christ. *The Story of a Soul* is chock-full of biblical citations. Thérèse quotes Psalm 106:1 - “the Lord is good, His mercy endures forever”—to express her gratitude for the many gifts she has received. She teaches us to live lives of gratitude. When she writes about her experience of God’s mercy, she spontaneously inserts Matthew 15:27: “From time to time He lets me eat ‘the crumbs under the table of the children.’ How great is His mercy!”

Father Craig proclaimed: “She knew the Bible well and then applied it to her own daily experience. She wanted to live the Gospel each day! She teaches me

to do the same. At school, I watch young women and men come to read the Word of God in Hebrew and Greek and then come to a deeper understanding of that Word in their own lives. This was the hope of St. Thérèse for herself, and I am able to witness this moment of grace in the students I teach.”

Craig teaches in Rome, living in the Carmelite Parish of San Martino. (The Carmelites were given this parish by Pope Boniface VIII in 1299 and we have been here ever since.) Thus, whether in the classroom or in the parish church, he knows the impact the Word of God has on the lives of people. He loves to explain that: “St. Thérèse knew the Bible and especially the Gospels very well. More importantly, she had a personal relationship with Jesus that she compared to the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) who asked the Samaritan for a drink of water. She saw her life has graced by the living water that Jesus had given to her, and she lived her life in gratitude for that living water. She invites us all to do the same.”

Father Craig Morrison is an internationally known and revered speaker, who shares his knowledge and insights with passion that touches hearts and minds. In the summers, he often offers biblical programs at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Center in Niagara Falls. His intensity and dynamic style rival the water cascading over the falls, as he inspires and ignites biblical wisdom in people of faith. St. Thérèse must be proud to have Father Craig Morrison as her brother in Carmel.



## BROTHER DAVID SEMMENS, O. CARM.

Brother David Semmens was born in Idaho of a father who received a doctoral degree at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. His mother is a surgical nurse. He is the fourth of six children. Education was important in his family. Brother Dave received a master’s degree in geophysical engineering in Montana and worked for 10 years as a computer programmer. During this time, he felt something was missing and began to question: “What am I working for?”

In his mid-late 30s, he felt the call to join the Carmelites. His mother, grandmother, and two aunts had a great devotion to the Little Flower, sharing stories of miraculous healing, with statues, pictures and prayer books about her, as if St. Thérèse was a part of his upbringing. Thérèse seemed to be an old family friend, someone he was comfortable with.

After completing his Carmelite formation and taking solemn vows in 2011, he was assigned to Mount Carmel High School in Chicago. It was a challenging four years as Brother David learned that teaching adolescent boys was not his calling. We all have to learn our limits, which help us discern where God is calling us. His reflective prayer life would lead him to learning and teaching in a whole different way.

Listening to that inner voice, he asked to join Father Peter Hinde, O. Carm. in his life of simplicity, accompaniment, and social justice activism among the poor. Father Peter encouraged him to live in and volunteer at a guest house for migrants in El Paso, Texas. He bonded with Father Peter and frequented Casa Tabor, a faith and justice community in Ciudad Juarez

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*My relationship with the Little Flower is comfortable. She is an old family friend. There are times when this relationship fades into the background, but at important times in my life, I am reminded of this relationship.*

in Mexico. He learned the biblical truth that the poor and refugees can teach us so much about God and the justice of God's Kingdom.

The Carmelite Provincial did suggest to him that he needed a paying job to help support himself. A Jesuit priest helped Brother David become a chaplain at the El Paso Processing Center, a federal detention center for migrants, where he has ministered for seven years.

“In my work as Chaplain, I met people from all over the world suffering through the trauma of migration and detention. ... Some carry the suffering with intention, and they seem to lighten the suffering of others having difficulty of losing everything: culture, identity, country and family. In this way, listening and trying to hear the stories of their experience, I can image God to them—the God Who listens and is with them,” Brother David explains.

“This ministry to migrants and refugees has to do with the question of suffering. At the detention center, I learned from a Sikh religious leader. I told him I felt sad coming into the barbed wire every day. He told me: ‘There’s barbed wire and then there’s barbed wire’—explaining that a lot of people on the outside are also walking around in barbed wire. His point was important for me in this moment of my life.”

Brother David's self-awareness, maturation and education deepened as he learned to become present to a person going through the trauma of profound suffering, and how it reflects St. Thérèse's Little Way of confidence and trust. People of various faiths who work at the detention center helped David understand, when he asked them how to be present to suffering. He learned: “Suffering is an opportunity.” And he heard it explained as “there is a path on which every breath and every step leads to the cessation of suffering. A gentle embrace of suffering in the present moment leads to understanding and understanding to compassion, a transformation of that suffering.” It so reflects the paschal mystery of Jesus' life, suffering, death and resurrection.”

This is certainly the Little Way spirituality of the Little Flower. The experience of great saints and mystics is that great love and great suffering wake us up to the deeper truth of God's love, presence and sovereignty. God is with us in our suffering. It is the message of the cross. We are most like God when we learn it is not about us, but as we share his compassion and presence with those suffering pain, injustice and alienation.

In one of the Thérèse booklets he received after his

grandmother died, Brother David found the inspiration that the Little Flower wrote on the mercy of God: “Your arms then, Jesus, are the lift which must raise me, even up to heaven! For this I need not to grow; on the contrary, I must remain little. I must tend ever to become yet more little ... since it has been given to me to understand the love of the heart of Jesus, I own that it has chased all fear from my heart.”

David explains: “My relationship with the Little Flower is comfortable. She is an old family friend. There are times when this relationship fades into the background, but at important times in my life, I am reminded of this relationship. For example, before joining the Carmelites, when I was seeking an answer to the question ‘Why am I working?’ her presence with our family came to mind. In 2000, the relics of the Little Flower came through Houston, Texas where I was starting my pre-novitiate year with the Carmelites. Our community had the task of driving the relics from Houston to New Orleans. Before we left to go to New Orleans, I went to the back of the van carrying the relics. I took a bottle of glass cleaner and some paper towels to clean the cover of the reliquary. It was covered with fingerprints. These fingerprints were a reminder of the many people who came to visit her. What

was their relationship with the Little Flower? How many others know her as an old family friend?

“I have always been aware from my youth that the members of the Society of the Society of the Little Flower were supporting our Carmelite formation, as well as our ministries and life. But like my relationship with the Little Flower, often my awareness of the members of the Society of the Little Flower fades into the background. But the awareness is there and at important times comes back to consciousness. I am confident that those who are friends of the Little Flower will forgive me for this. It was the Little Flower who said: ‘Charity consists in bearing with all the defects of our neighbor, in not being surprised at his failings, and in being edified by his least virtues.’”

St. Thérèse and her Little Way of confidence and trust have deeply influenced Brother David Semmens, especially her emphasis on God's mercy. His ministry with the poor and migrants is a source of edification, doing what St. Thérèse always wanted to do as a missionary of mercy. He learned from unexpected sources and other religious traditions and people of faith, and especially from the poor, we can easily dismiss. Brother David is a living moment of grace as he listens and gives hope to people easily forgotten. As he says: “Thérèse has been a part of my spiritual journey as well as the Society of the Little Flower. Please keep the migrants going through detention here in your thoughts and prayers.” 



# Is everything *really* Grace?

**St. Thérèse often remarked, that “Everything is grace.” That can be an easy thing to say when all is going well, but when it is not, is everything still grace? St. Thérèse had no doubts.**

One might wonder if Thérèse was a Carmelite version of Pollyanna, the 11-year-old orphan with the unfailingly optimistic attitude. Hardly. St. Thérèse didn’t have blinders on, and she had to deal with plenty of hardships over her 24 years of life. But even in the midst of those life trials, she knew everything was still grace.

As she came to the end of her earthly life, St. Thérèse was physically unable to receive Holy Communion. She treasured meeting the Lord through that sacrament, and when she no longer could, her heart had to ache. But her response was one of great faith: “No doubt, it is a great grace to receive the sacraments. When God does not permit it, it is good too! Everything is grace, because my longing for you is even more!”

If only we could possess that same faith, to realize that God can take every circumstance we encounter and make it a vehicle that will ultimately bring us to our final reward.

At the Society of the Little Flower, we remain forever grateful for the faith that you place in us, be that through your occasional gifts or even by remembering the society in your estate plan. It is because of your sacrifices that we can lead others to understand what St. Thérèse deeply understood: that God never lets go of us, that he is forever our companion and wants nothing but the best for us. As we grow into that knowledge, we, too, can proclaim, “Everything is Grace!”

In many ways, the following reflection captures that spirit and confidence of St. Thérèse. Perhaps, one day, this may be a reflection that we, too, can embrace:

*“In the fading moments of life when many would crumble in despair—your tiny heart expanded to unwrap the gift of grace in a devastating deathbed journey.*

*From the slightest shadow of distraction to the darkest cloud of disappointment, your trusting vision perceived an unfolding light of blessing in the blackest of nights.*

*Open the eyes of my heart, Thérèse, that I too might find grace when my dreams are dashed, my life diminished or my visions waylaid.*

*Strengthen my journey that I might trust in the prevailing grace of my Creator in all the situations of my life.”*

Your friendship to the Society of the Little Flower has been a true source of grace for us. Our Carmelite seminarians are indebted to you for your kindness in supporting their vocations. The poor whom we serve throughout the world depend on your sacrifices. And, of course, the thousands who turn to St. Thérèse for spiritual guidance, a ministry made possible through your gifts to us, also owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude. You are a graceful friend!

Should circumstances allow you to further your support of the Society of the Little Flower through your estate plan, we would be deeply grateful. A gift of any size, made through your will or trust, or by designating the Society to be a beneficiary of your IRA or life insurance policy, would make a tremendous difference as we plan for the years to come. In gratitude, we would be pleased to enroll you in our Legacy Society, the Rose Garden of St. Thérèse, with its perpetual spiritual benefits. 🌹

**To assist you with the estate planning process, we would be happy to send you a free copy of our booklet, “Effective Estate Planning: What You Need to Know.” To request your copy, please contact our Special Gifts office at 888-996-1212.**

BY DAN PRITCHARD

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

# *Graced Moments*



**MERCY IS THE ESSENCE OF GOD. GRACE IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD, WHO PERMEATES ALL ASPECTS OF OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCE.** Mercy sees the big picture and make us big hearted and more expansive than we can imagine. Created in the image of God, mercy manifests our true and best selves. We give people the benefit of the doubt. Like God, we see the deeper goodness in people and experiences, and do not shrink them by our petty judgments.

The heretical Jansenism, which infected our Church and spirituality for the last several hundred years, connected God with severity and excessive fear of eternal punishment. Deeply rooted in Scripture as she was, St. Thérèse, through her own deep insights and graced inspiration, came to see that the love of God was synonymous with Divine Mercy. She constantly believed: “God is compassionate and filled with gentleness, slow to punish, and abundant in mercy, for He knows our frailty. As a father has tenderness for his children, so the Lord has compassion on us all.”

She is a Doctor of the Church because she prophetically broke through the uptight heretical religion that prevented people of faith from accepting the mercy and intimacy of God. Who can be intimate with someone they are afraid of? Scrupulosity fueled by fear permeated people’s faith life. We were more afraid of going to hell, rather than opening ourselves to the unconditional and almost reckless generosity of our merciful God, as Jesus taught us.

Certain elements of our Church stressed the judgment of God and fear of hell, because it is effective. Fear keeps us confined and in line. Obedience and exact following of laws became more important than love and mercy to one another. Doesn’t Jesus shake His head in frustration as He sees us contorting the message of God is Love and Mercy, which He came to reveal and clarify in the most human of ways?

Of course, some people love that fear-driven approach because at least it addresses our security needs: If we do this God will reward us. It is a transactional approach. Like we have to earn it rather than receive it as a free gift from a merciful God. Faith is about trusting

God’s goodness and mercy. The only security we have is that this merciful God is sovereign and in charge.

When Thérèse wrote her beautiful *Oblation to Merciful Love*, offering herself as a victim of Holocaust to God’s merciful Love, it was a product of many hours and weeks of prayer, dialogue, reflection, contemplation and silent listening. She wanted it to be a statement of her self-emptying life of surrender, inspired by Jesus. When she shared it with her spiritual director, who was now in Canada, he responded by mail, complimenting her about the power and beauty of her surrender and experience of Divine Mercy, but suggested that somehow it did not make room for hell, because our Church teaches that there is a hell, a state of being separated from God.

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Blessed are the  
merciful, for mercy  
will be theirs.

(MATT 5:7) JESUS OF NAZARETH

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When she received his response, she reflected deeply, but eventually wrote back: “If our Church teaches there is a hell, there must be, but I know and believe it is empty!” She believed that God’s mercy so understood the wounds and struggles of many people’s lives that led them to abuse, sin, destruction, violence, etc., that He embraces them in their self-destructive pain. She deeply believed in God’s infinite mercy. She told many of the Carmelite nuns about this and some of them were horrified.

They saw the fear of hell as the defining issue of religion. They thought she was too simple, incredibly naïve or just not in touch with cruel reality. She heard Jesus say: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.” This is extremely generous mercy. Or is it a case of God being as merciful to us as we are merciful to each other? An echo of the Our Father: “forgive us as we forgive one another!” What a frightening concept! Don’t we actually hope that God is much more forgiving and merciful than we are!

Personally, sometimes I want to believe in a crowded hell, because I know people who should be there, but does a merciful God? We want strict justice more than mercy—and yet maybe justice is Divine Mercy for everyone! How would the belief that hell is empty affect our lives? Would we be more responsive to God’s pursuing and merciful love, than to our fears?

The Little Flower’s Little Way of confidence and trust challenges and calms us in the loving gaze and embrace of God’s heart. She believed and taught that the mercy of God stoops down from heaven and breaks out within us in our powerlessness. She implied that the lack of such trust in God’s mercy was offensive. The Little Way of confidence and trust allows the Spirit of Jesus to be our guide and energizing force as we enmesh mercy in a very conflictive and judgmental world.

We only know of St. Thérèse’s deep spiritual journey because of catty comments made about her by another Carmelite as she looked sick again: “What are we going to say about her when she dies, because she is so simple.” Overheard by another nun, it was reported to the Prioress, Mother Agnes of Jesus, who was actually Pauline, Thérèse’s third mother (after Zélie, her biological mother, and Rose Taille, her nursing mother). Mother Agnes encouraged Thérèse to write down what was going on in her life, because she was such a good story teller and a creative and insightful person. The Little Flower refused because she remembered her Christmas conversion was about Jesus telling her, ‘Get over yourself, it is not about you!’

So Pauline (Mother Agnes) came back and reminded the reticent Sister Thérèse that she was not asking her as her older sister, but as Superior of the Carmelite Convent, playing the obedience card. After some serious reflection, Thérèse informed Pauline that she could not do that “because it is not about me”—but that she would write about the mercy of God in her life.

Thus the opening lines of her *Story of a Soul*, she writes: “Dear Mother, the day you asked me to do this, it seemed to me it would distract my heart by too much concentration on myself . . . I’m going to be doing only one thing: I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: The Mercies of the Lord.”

And that is her simple message to us. Everything is about God’s mercy, because “Everything is grace.” God so permeates every aspect of our human existence and experience. Then quoting St. Paul: “It is not a question of who wills nor runs, but of God’s showing mercy.”

She came to understand that in spite of the challenges, disappointments, imperfections and wounds of life, we live in an enchanted world of graced moments.

It was a safe world, not a sinful world, because God is so intimate and mercifully engaged with us. We simply have to cooperate with the God in whose image we are created, whose divine spark is our human soul, and whose merciful love defines us as beloved. Holiness is God’s gift and is manifested in mercy to each other and ourselves. Each and all of us are loved by God’s presence, as we are, and invited to be even better.

She teaches us that holiness has nothing to do with merits, it is not purchased. Salvation is not bought—no matter how heroic we think we and our actions are. God freely and unconditionally is both the giver and the gift of our sanctity. If we trust this “good news,” it overwhelms our sins and manifests itself in mercy to others—to everyone!

We are here to be the light of the world and salt of the earth—but it is God’s light and the Spirit who enhance and excite the taste of our true selves as God knows us.

“  
I offer myself as an oblation to God’s  
merciful love ... allowing the waves of infinite  
tenderness to overflow my soul.”

– ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX



Thérèse was adamant that being self-sufficient in the pursuit of sanctity is an illusion. We often think it is “all about me.” In fact, it is all about God’s mercy carrying us. She knew how difficult self-acceptance can be, why we have a radical mistrust of ourselves, and a frightening capacity for self-delusion, because of our self-centeredness. God first and always loves us. We are to surrender our imperfections to the mercy of God, who forgives and raises us up and overwhelms us with His mercy.

In fact, many spiritual people who studied her life and spirituality came to realize that God does not love us in spite of our imperfections, but because of them—because those are the spaces where God can permeate our darkness. Imperfections are the cracks where the light comes in, as Leonard Cohen wrote in his song: “The Anthem”: “Ring the bells

that still can ring, Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything; That’s how the light gets in.”

She teaches us to see our imperfections as graced moments where God can truly save, shine through and brighten our lives and our world. It is about the merciful eyes of God lifting us closer to Himself.

All of us experience disappointments, betrayals, wounds, losses, setbacks, painful struggles, and challenges beyond our control. Unless we allow these wounds to teach us and transform us, we end up transmitting them to others. Flight or fight does not work—denial does not heal. These wounds often make us bitter, angry, judgmental, depressed or blaming others. It brings out the worst in us. We become warriors of revenge or darkness, unless we take a merciful reflective approach to what has happened, listening to Jesus on the cross, dying but

proclaiming: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.” This is mercy that heals. “Into Your hands I commend my spirit.”

Mercy knows and trusts that God is in charge and will bring good out of everything. Mercy knows there is more than what is obvious. Or that others don’t realize why or what they are doing even if we try to impute motive. We make these wounds by allowing them to define us in limiting and dysfunctional ways.

As beloved daughters and sons of God, we need to be merciful to ourselves, being faithful to our divine DNA, which is our best and truest selves. And humbly aware that is all gift from God, we see and treat others with mercy, because the essence of God is Mercy—and therefore it is our essence. God makes us big hearted and more expansive than we can imagine. Like God, we see the deeper goodness in people and experiences, we give them the benefit of the doubt.

Our challenge as followers of Jesus and friends of St. Thérèse is to reflect and pray—communing with the merciful presence of God, deep within us and all around us, to soften and change our hearts. It is always frightening and discouraging me, in confessions and spiritual direction, how many people are still afraid of God, even as He is bathing them in mercy. Why don’t we believe in the mercy of God? I often tell people that their penance is to spend 10 minutes of time in prayer, listening in silence to God instead of talking Him to death. Listen to the whispers of divine mercy that can and will change our hearts and lives—and our world.

The bottom line is that grace is God’s unconditional love in action, freely embracing us in our imperfections and transforming us with Divine Mercy. Yes, blessed are the merciful for mercy shall be theirs, because St. Thérèse teaches us how to swim in the waves of infinite tenderness that is God’s merciful love overflowing our souls. These are the graced moments of our lives. Let us be alert, watching and extending mercy to ourselves, others, and the world we live in, because it is divine merciful intimacy embracing and defining us. 🌹

# GOD, GRACE AND *Thankfulness*

**They go together. The definition of grace is “the freely and unmerited favor and love of God.” Spiritually, grace is the basis of our Christian faith.**

One of the many holy, deeply spiritual, and profound quotes of St. Thérèse is: “Everything is grace.” How right she is!

We live and breathe every moment by the grace of God. Every sunrise and sunset, and every second in between, every person, every living thing, and the goodness within each of us are the grace and face of God.

There is a beautiful prayer that has a sentence within it that resonates. It reads “It is only because of your kindness and grace that I am able to get through each day.” Every time I read that sentence I say, “Alleluia Amen.” It is a meaningful prayer of thankfulness for the many graces of God. It reads:

### *Prayer of Thanks*

*Gracious Lord,*

*Thank you for this lovely day. I come before you with a grateful heart. Thank you for all of your blessings and goodness in my life. It is only because of your kindness and grace that I am able to get through each day. I give you glory. I give you all of my love and adoration. Thank you for loving me and forgiving my sins. I want to express my gratitude to you, Lord, for everything you have done in my life. Thank you for being my provider, I appreciate your works in my life. Thank you for being my guide and helping me in making good decisions. Thank you for being my sustainer in life. Even when things are difficult, I trust that You are working and that You will always see me through. Thank you, Lord, for all that you do in my life. I bless your holy name.*

*Amen.*

May the Grace and love of God be in every moment of your every day.

Your friend in St. Thérèse,  
Mary Zacharias 🌹

BY MARY ZACHARIAS

# *Love Blossoms* Amidst the Relics of St. Thérèse



**I**n our town of Darien, Illinois, where history and spirituality converge, an unforgettable love story was written on the pages of time. Benjamin and Tabitha, a devoted couple hailing from New England, embarked on a journey to the very heart of the United States. This pilgrimage was not just an ordinary visit to the Shrine of St. Thérèse; it was a celebration of love, faith, and devotion that would culminate in a graced moment that would forever be etched in their hearts and ours.

Sept. 29th, 2023 was a day to remember, as it held a special place in the hearts of Benjamin and Tabitha. For Benjamin, this day was significant because it marked the feast day of St. Michael, his patron Saint, who had watched over him throughout his life. Tabitha, on the other hand, was deeply moved by the date as it was the feast day of her beloved patron Saint, St. Thérèse. The significance of this day would soon be revealed in the most enchanting way.

Their journey to Darien was more than just a physical voyage; it was a spiritual and emotional one as well. The couple's devotion to St. Thérèse runs deep. They had traveled a long way from their New England home to experience the relics and create lasting memories.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow on the

quaint town of Darien, the National Shrine of St. Thérèse stood as a light of faith and love. The Shrine, a place of pilgrimage for the devout, is known for its tranquil beauty and spiritual serenity. On this special evening, it would serve as the backdrop for a love story that transcends the ordinary.

The couple's joy was immeasurable, and their journey was about to take a new direction. To ensure that the proposal remained a surprise for Tabitha, careful planning was required.

As the couple made their way towards the Shrine, Tabitha, walking by Benjamin's side, was blissfully unaware of the enchanting moment that awaited them. The air was filled with a sense of reverence and awe as they approached the hallowed hall of the Shrine. The relics of St. Thérèse in front of the altar,

provided a majestic backdrop for what was about to transpire.

Hand in hand, Benjamin and Tabitha entered the sacred space, their hearts brimming with love and devotion. The atmosphere inside was imbued with a profound sense of peace and serenity, which enveloped them like a warm embrace. St. Thérèse's presence was with every step, and her spirit seemed to guide them forward.

To preserve the surprise, the photographer knelt in prayer a few pews behind the relics, keeping her camera hidden from view. As the couple approached, the heartfelt prayers of those few who were present added an extra layer of spirituality to the event, invoking the blessings of St. Thérèse and her heavenly intercession.

A hushed anticipation filled the air,

and as the couple neared the relics, a soft and soul-stirring melody filled the shrine. Hymn lyrics resonated, adding an emotional dimension to the moment.

Benjamin, with a heart full of love, took Tabitha's hand in his and knelt before her. His voice, filled with emotion, began to speak words that would change their lives forever.

Tears of joy and surprise welled up in Tabitha's eyes as she gazed at Benjamin, her heart overflowing with love. The presence of St. Thérèse seemed to envelop her, granting her blessings from above.

Tabitha reflected saying yes!

Tabitha said, "Getting engaged at the National Shrine of St. Thérèse was the most magical and precious moment I've ever experienced." Looking at that moment, Benjamin said, "It was a dream come true."

Benjamin placed the beautiful engagement ring onto Tabitha's finger, sealing their commitment with a symbol of love and eternity. The applause of those present filled the sacred space, marking the joyous occasion.

Their engagement was a beautiful fusion of faith, love, and devotion. The National Shrine of St. Thérèse, a place where countless pilgrims seek solace and spiritual guidance, had witnessed a profound and heartwarming moment. "It has long been a dream of mine to make this trip," Tabitha said,

which made the engagement here that much more special.

After the engagement, the couple spent some quiet moments before the relics of Sts. Louis and Zélie, the parents of St. Thérèse. These were the very people who had raised St. Thérèse in a nurturing and loving environment, and receiving their blessings was a cherished moment for the newly engaged couple.

They prayed before the relics, silently offering their prayers and gratitude. The love and devotion of Sts. Louis and Zélie, known for their holiness and commitment to family life, were a powerful reminder of the kind of love and marriage to which the Church calls all spouses to. It was a moment of reflection and gratitude for the journey that had led them to this point.

As the evening continued, the couple walked the shrine grounds and took in the beauty of the surrounding gardens. Flowers of all colors and fragrances filled the air, and the moon shone brightly overhead, casting a gentle glow over the sacred grounds.

Their engagement, in the presence of St. Thérèse and her loving parents, had been a beautiful testament to their faith, love, and the significance of their patron saints in their lives. It was a reminder that love, when grounded in faith and devotion, can create moments of profound beauty and meaning. 🌹

*The couple's love story had been intertwined with the guidance and intercession of their patron saints, and their engagement was a culmination of that journey. It was a testament to the power of love, faith, and the belief that some moments in life are so magical that they can only be explained by the divine hand of God.*

*In the quiet town of Darien, Illinois, on that unforgettable September night, love had blossomed amidst the relics of St. Thérèse, and the world seemed a little brighter for Benjamin and Tabitha, who had taken a leap of faith and love.*



St. Thérèse  
Family

Home

## *Silence that Heals*

**It is in the space between notes;  
in the crisp and clear air  
that we will all come to know  
just exactly who we are.**

**When we pray, God speaks  
in the silence.**

**We pour our hearts out  
and He moves love to our souls' inns.  
He heals us like art now.**

**Go to Him like a Child  
and your tears He will wipe.  
Go to Him suffering and beaten  
and your wounds He will bind.  
Go to Him awash and adrift  
and your life He will tenderly mind.**

**We are His and through us His  
Light of Mercy and of Peace  
Shines on every moment, hollering:  
Everything is grace!**

BY KEVIN KELLER



## Graced Moments FROM CANADA

**This being the Canadian Corner of *Between Friends*, I thought it would be most fitting and joyful to share some graced moments with you from my initial and ongoing formation journey with the Carmelites. As you must know by now, I hail from the far eastern corner of Canada, the southeast coast of Newfoundland. I'm not one of the Wise Men from the East—anything but.**

I entered the Carmelite Pre-Novitiate Program in Whitefriars Hall in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 1, 1993. I was drawn to the Carmelites, first by my great aunt, who was a Franciscan sister in New Jersey. After she introduced me to the Carmelites, I was basically blown away by the stories shared by many Carmelites on the vocation retreats I attended. They were real men, with real graced stories, who did great things. The stories they shared were filled with grace and struggles. They weren't perfect men, but they weren't afraid to pull up their sleeves and get messy with and for the people of God. There was something

very intriguing about that. Especially for me, after having worked in a fish plant for several years, elbows deep in fish guts and cods heads and tongues. One Carmelite I remember, defined us as “the stinking fishermen,” of course referring to the men Jesus called from the Sea of Galilee. I loved that image. Still do.

Moving to Washington, D.C., was quite an adjustment from a little fishing village 2,000 miles away. For the next six years, I delved into many areas of ministry. While studying at the Washington Theological Union, I took up weekly ministry with Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity at Gift of Peace AIDS Hospice.

Lord, when did we see you sick? That opened my eyes to human suffering and rejection, and it gave me many powerfully graced moments. During my novitiate year in Middletown, New York, I ministered in a psychiatric prison with those who were classified as criminally insane. Not a term that's used today. Lord, when did we see you in prison? This prepared me for many difficult encounters I would face over the years. Everything is Grace!

Upon returning to Washington to commence my studies, having professed my first vows, I ministered for the next three years with a 400-bed homeless shelter in southeast Washington, D.C., and also at Bethlehem House, for persons with disabilities. All these ministries were incorporated into my studies through reflection seminars and theological reflections. I wrote many papers on those experiences. I professed my solemn vows

in Niagara Falls, Canada, in June 1998, having completed a student internship at Our Lady of Peace Parish and Sacred Heart Parish in 1995-1996.

My final formation ministry, from whence would come the meat for my thesis papers, was a summer in Mississippi, directing Vacation Bible Camps for children in the Appalachian regions. That was certainly a mixed joy! Talk about crosses and roses! With 120 degree temperatures out in the middle of nowhere, in a rundown Presbyterian Camp, running from snakes and tornadoes, mice and cockroaches running around the dorms, we made a great community experience for hundreds of young children from across the state. We were assisted by university students across the United States. God is everywhere. And we Carmelites follow the motto, "Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus." We are never limited to where we can serve. One of the beauties of being a Carmelite.

For the rest of that summer, I traveled Mississippi, presiding at Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. With a 2 percent Catholic population, these little chapels were storefronts. And wouldn't you know it, one Sunday, an elderly lady in the small congregation asked me, "I recognize your accent. Where are you from?" "Newfoundland, Canada", I said. "Well, so am I." Wow! She had left Newfoundland during World War II and married a man in the U.S. Air Force. Small world. She had never been back home.

I was ordained to the priesthood on May 15, 1999, at Mount Carmel Chapel, Shrine of St. Thérèse the Little Flower, in Niagara Falls, Canada," That was 25 years ago. It was a glorious and graced day in my life, in the life of my family, and certainly in the life of the Carmelites. And why I am so excited to share this special anniversary with you is because you, our donors and benefactors, supported me throughout the entire journey. And you continue to support us. Without your generosity, we could never keep our Houses of Formation going. We are blessed. We are grateful.

St. Thérèse has always been a huge part of my journey. From the time I was a little boy, I used to gaze upon her picture in my grandparents' kitchen and wonder what those roses and cross were

all about. I came to know the answer very clearly throughout my journey. One of the many blessings I received during initial formation was to attend a week-long symposium on St. Thérèse in Lisieux, France, for Carmelite students around the world. No words can describe being permitted to go into her cloistered convent and pray in the room where she died. Then going to her family home in Les Buissonnets. I paused for a long while in her bedroom, where she had gazed upon Mary's statue as a young girl. With Mary's smile, Thérèse was assured that everything would be OK. And so was I. I even sat in her family pew at St. Peter's Church where she attended as a little girl. "Everything is Grace."

Ironically, my first assignment as a Carmelite priest was in none other than St. Thérèse Parish in Cresskill, New Jersey, as Parochial Vicar. This town was next to Tenafly, New Jersey, where my great aunt, Sister Mary Regalata Power, OSF, was living out her senior years at Our Lady of the Angels Convent. She also hailed from St. Mary's Bay, Newfoundland. What a joy to be so close to her. I saw her every week, and had many lunches with her. I brought her treats from Newfoundland and played the accordion for the Franciscan sisters in the convent! Truly a blessing for me it was to give a little joy back to the woman and her sisters who led me in the direction of the Carmelites. So many graced moments.

After three glorious years in Cresskill, New Jersey, and with some pressure from Father Malachi Smith, O. Carm., I returned to Canada. Right to Niagara Falls. Father Malachi, a former Provincial, had made it clear to the powers that be that this man, Gerard, is a Canadian and not to forget that the donors and benefactors of the Society of the Little Flower in Canada have also supported his vocation over the years, and he really

should be ministering in Canada.

Well, it happened. I came to St. Patrick Parish in Niagara Falls in June 2002 as Parochial Vicar with Father Tony McNamara, O. Carm., as Pastor. I stayed on as Parochial Vicar and Administrator until the end of 2007, when I was appointed as Pastor.

And what a journey it has been for 25 years. From gazing upon the picture of St. Thérèse in my childhood and wondering about the roses and the cross in her hands, I now have an idea. "Everything is Grace." We have to take the roses and the crosses in life, and the thorns as well. We have to step out of our comfort zones and do good, make sacrifices. To say "Everything is Grace," doesn't mean that everything is easy, or perfect. Not at all. Look at the life of St. Thérèse. With God, all things are possible.

I thank God for the past 30 years as a Carmelite, and 25 years as a Carmelite priest. Easy? Not always. Worth it? You bet. And the journey has been so much easier with the protection of Mary, and my relationship with her as my sister. Plugging into the zeal and justice of the fiery Prophet Elijah, our spiritual Father, is a must if we want to serve on the edges of society where the cries for help can be truly heard. With St. Thérèse in my corner, showering down not only roses, but light and strength, and courage, this has made my journey truly grace-filled.

And it goes without saying, but I will say it again, loud and clear, that this journey is made possible for me, and countless other Carmelites worldwide, because of you, our donors and benefactors of the Society of the Little Flower. In thanking all of you, I also want to ask a special request: Pray for vocations! We need more men and women to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as Carmelites. God bless all of you. I will continue to pray for you, and I ask that you pray for me. 🌹



**Father Gerard Power, O.Carm.** Director in Canada of the Society of the Little Flower.

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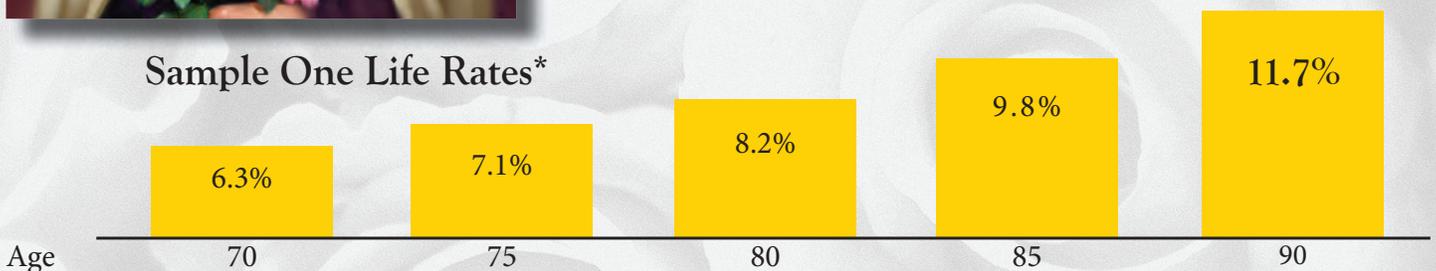
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