

Between Friends

A publication for the Friends of the Society of

the Little Flower, Darien, Illinois, and Canada



THE *Steps* OF THE *Soul*

Finding God's Presence



Rev. Thomas Schrader, O. Carm.
Director

Dear Friends,

"Jesus, your arms are the elevator which will lift me to heaven!" These profound words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux invite us to reflect on her simple yet transformative spirituality. She teaches us that holiness is not about grand gestures but about walking the steps of life with trust, humility, and love, allowing Jesus to carry us when the climb feels too steep.

Thérèse's "Little Way" reminds us to embrace the realities of our lives, finding God's presence in every step we take. Through her journey — from childhood struggles to the profound surrender of her final years — she shows us how to integrate the effort of the stairway with the grace of the elevator, trusting completely in God's love.

As we delve into the "Steps of the Soul" spirituality, may her story inspire you to trust in God's presence and embrace the journey He sets before you.

In Christ's Love,

Rev. Thomas Schrader, O. Carm. 🌹

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A JOURNEY OF TRUST, HUMILITY AND LOVE

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you well and surrounded by God's grace. Inspired by the spirituality of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, I invite you to reflect on her "Steps of the Soul" — a journey of trust, humility, and love that brings us closer to God.

St. Thérèse saw herself too small to climb the steep stairs of perfection alone. Instead, she turned to Jesus, her "elevator," trusting in His arms to carry her. Each step in her life — from childhood calls for reassurance to her profound surrender in the Carmel convent — became a path of love and transformation. Her journey reminds us that God walks with us through every challenge, offering His steady, loving presence.

Today, we continue to share her message of hope and trust. Your support enables us to create spaces for reflection, prayer, and spiritual growth through retreats, outreach programs, and community initiatives.

Please consider partnering with us in this mission. Your generosity will help others experience the peace and love of God as they take their own steps of faith. Together, we can guide souls closer to Him.

In gratitude for your prayers and support,
Mary Therese Lambert,
International Development Director

P.S. Let us, like St. Thérèse, trust in the "elevator" of God's love.

Thank you for journeying with us in faith. . 🌸



Mary Therese Lambert
Editor of *Between Friends*

Someone you Should Know



GISELE MULCAHEY

My name is Gisele Mulcahey, and I grew up in the beautiful and complex country of Lebanon with my three siblings in a Catholic family. Lebanon, though small in size, is immense in spirit and devotion, particularly to its saints, such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose intercession is cherished.

My native Lebanon is in the news these days and it grieves me. Despite decades of conflict and adversity, Lebanon remains a land of stunning contrasts and enduring vitality. Its history stretches back to ancient times, serving as the cradle of the Phoenician civilization.

Culturally, Lebanon is a melting pot, a meeting place of East and West, where traditions and modernity blend seamlessly. Nature in Lebanon is equally captivating. From the snow-capped peaks of Mount Lebanon to the fertile Bekaa Valley, from

ancient cedar forests to the sparkling Mediterranean coastline, the country offers a wealth of scenic diversity. Religiously and socially, Lebanon exemplifies a unique tapestry of coexistence, with Christians, Muslims, and Druze living side by side, each contributing to the country's rich mosaic of customs and beliefs. This diversity is celebrated through shared traditions and mutual respect, even amid challenges. Lebanese cuisine is a testament to the country's warmth and hospitality.

I was married in January 2000 and immigrated from Lebanon to the United States. My husband and I raised our two daughters and a son here in Darien, IL. When I was young, my mother, who is very religious, taught me about St. Thérèse, who is her patron saint. I loved her story, but being in a youth group, I was introduced to the stories of many saints, so my devotion became divided among them. When I found out that there was a shrine for St. Thérèse very close to my house, I was thrilled. The shrine and museum became my go-to place whenever I wanted to feel peace, and it is still the first place I take family and friends who visit from out of state or from other countries.

I have been working at the Society of the Little Flower for almost two and a half years. I was going through a time when I wanted a change in

my life – a meaningful change – and after a lot of praying and asking St. Thérèse for her intercession while I was at Mass at the Shrine one day, her Shower of Roses indeed came upon me and blessed me with this opportunity. At the Society, I am an Internet & Digital Fundraising Services Associate, and I also give tours at the museum and shrine.

Both responsibilities are equally enjoyable. While working in the Internet department brings out my creativity, I have to admit that giving tours brings joy to my heart. I love interacting with people and hearing their stories and experiences related to the Little Flower. Even the simplest connections, like when students share that “they too are the youngest child in the family like St. Thérèse was,” or that their middle or confirmation name is Thérèse, bring me joy. I also love when pilgrims express their excitement at seeing all the artifacts in the museum that St. Thérèse used, or the replica of her cell that shows how simple, humble, and devoted she was.

St. Thérèse said, “Everything is Grace,” and that’s what gives me great hope and keeps me going. No matter what I encounter day to day, I know she is looking after me. That is why she is now my biggest role model, patron saint, and intercessor, with her “Little Way” of confidence and trust.



ASHLEY MARIE SZABO

A native of a suburb in Illinois, I moved in 2019 to be closer to the Society of the Little Flower for my new job. My faith is central to my life, and I hope to one day be blessed with a loving spouse and children.

At the Society of the Little Flower, my responsibilities include managing donor relations through walk-ins, phone calls, emails, and other correspondence. I also assist with events at our shrine and museum and help coordinate tours for visiting groups. Having been with the organization for five years, I deeply value the relationships I have built with both co-workers and donors. Many of my colleagues from the start of my journey here have

become like family, enriching my professional and personal experience.

Many members of the society recognize me by name when they call or visit our office, which reaffirms the meaningful connections I strive to build. It's incredibly rewarding to know that my work positively impacts their lives, whether through a phone call or in-person assistance. Donors often share their struggles with me. When I assure them that the

Carmelites will continue to pray for them, their heartfelt reactions – often tears of gratitude – are a humbling reminder of the importance of compassion in my role.

Prayer is a powerful thing, and definitely not something to take for granted. Sometimes our members just want to know that someone cares enough to listen to them and be kind to them.

In 2019, when I saw this potential job opportunity, I had never heard of St. Thérèse. Over the years, I have learned a lot about her, and I realize that she is definitely someone to admire. Her faith and love for Jesus are things we should all strive for. She ultimately loved Jesus with her whole heart and would do anything for Him. Like the Apostle Paul, she recognized suffering in a positive way, that it would bring her closer to Christ. She knew her weaknesses because her life was not easy and she dealt with pain and suffering like we all do. Even though she could not leave her convent, she still

continues to make a huge difference in people's lives. She is known for her "Little Way," doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

St. Thérèse has profoundly influenced my life, inspiring me to cultivate the "child-like faith" she embodied. She approached every moment with joy, trusting God completely and seeking only to please Him. Her example reminds me to embrace life's challenges with grace and faith. Through my interactions with members, I've often heard them describe St. Thérèse as their patron saint and best friend, cherishing her for what she represents.

I am deeply grateful for the journey God has placed me on, especially over the past five years. Inspired by St. Thérèse, I've dedicated myself to community service, which has become a true passion. I find immense fulfillment in giving back and am continually humbled by the opportunities this work provides. I look forward to discovering the plans God has in store for me next! 🌹

“ I FIND IMMENSE FULFILLMENT IN GIVING BACK ...”

ASHLEY MARIE SZABO



One Size Does Not Fit All

When it comes to supporting the Society of the Little Flower, sometimes we need to get creative.

No matter how well the economy is performing, it's natural to wonder when the next shoe might drop. Particularly as we get older, we can be concerned about having sufficient resources to make our day-to-day ends meet.

Did you know that there are ways to support the Society of the Little Flower while not tapping into our checking or savings accounts? These ways can both help us to promote the spirituality of St. Thérèse and provide the necessary resources to support our Carmelite seminarians, but they can also offer attractive benefits to you.

A Gift from Your IRA

If you are age 70 ½ or older, you can make a gift to the Society of the Little Flower from your IRA; this type of gift is called a "Qualified Charitable Distribution." If you are age 73+, you

can even use your Required Minimum Distribution to make such a distribution. Although gifts from your IRA do not afford a charitable tax deduction, the distribution will not be considered as taxable income when you file your tax return. This strategy allows you to maintain control of your cash should any future need arise. It can also be a wise tax strategy while considering your estate plan. (Please keep in mind that an IRA gift must come directly to us from your plan – do not take the distribution first.)

A Charitable Gift Annuity

Creating a charitable gift annuity is really two gifts in one: you make an irrevocable gift to the Society of the Little Flower, and in return you receive payments from us for the rest of your life. The rate of payment, which is based on

your age, will never change, no matter the ups and downs in the economy. Your payments are even partially tax-free, and if you itemize on your tax return, you also receive a charitable tax deduction for a portion of your gift. The Society's payout rates are among the best you can find, with the highest rate being 11.7% for those age 90 and above. Those age 70 ½ or older can create a gift annuity with IRA assets. Special rules apply, though, so please call us first to discuss the details.

A Gift of Securities

If you own shares of stock or a mutual fund that have increased in value (and you have held longer than one year), directly transferring those shares to the Society of the Little Flower's brokerage account is a tax-wise move. Your gift would be valued at the shares' price on the date of your gift, rather than the price you paid when you purchased the shares. In addition, you would not have to pay capital gains tax on your gift. For example, if you donate 10 shares of stock that you paid \$10/share for three years ago, and they are now worth \$50/share, you would be making a gift of \$500 for an out of pocket cost of \$100. Once again, this strategy frees up cash to be used for other purposes.

A Donor Advised Fund Distribution

If you have established a Donor Advised Fund, we encourage you to think of the Society of the Little Flower when making a grant from your fund. A Donor Advised Fund allows you to put assets into such a fund for future charitable distribution, while also providing a charitable deduction should your transfer exceed the standard deduction. This is a very attractive strategy at a time when the available standard deduction is quite high. You also have the opportunity to name the Society of the Little Flower as a final beneficiary of the Fund after God calls you home.

Should any of these strategies interest you and you would like to discuss the possibilities further, please reach out to me or any of the staff in our Special Gifts Office at 888-996-1212. We are happy to help – and do so without pressure! 🌹



Big Shoes to Fill

It was our last time together, and the only way he could communicate with me was by blinking his eyes. The end was near, and he could sense it.

I stood at his bedside, letting him know how grateful I was for our friendship. He had seen me through many tough times throughout the 50 years we knew each other. Although his eyes were fixed on me, I wasn't sure if he understood what I was saying. And then I saw the tears running down his face. Then I knew.

The encouragement and support John showed me over those years are marked deep within my soul. I wouldn't be the person I am today if we hadn't first met in 1966. High school, college, our first jobs with the same company, weddings, children, you name it – we were always there for each other.

On that last day, as John was letting go, his wife went to a closet and brought out a pair of his shoes. Mary Ann looked at me and handed the shoes to me. Her words were simple: “Dan, it's your turn to walk in these shoes.”

You would have had to know John to understand how powerful those words were. He showed amazing courage throughout his own life's challenges. He was ever faithful to his family and to his faith, always balanced by the humor of a south side Chicago Irishman. The shoes that were handed to me over 10 years ago are now worn and tattered. I slip them on occasionally – not only for old time's sake, but also to remember the challenge that was given to me by John's wife that day. They remain big shoes to fill.

St. Thérèse had her own set of big shoes to fill. As the baby of the Martin family, she had plenty of role models to look up to. Her big sister Pauline was like a second mother to her; she was her first teacher and ideal. When Thérèse was 9 years old, Pauline left the family to enter the Carmel in Lisieux. Thérèse was stunned.

It was shortly after Pauline's departure that Thérèse decided to join her at the Carmelite convent. It was her earnest desire, even at the age of 9, to walk in Pauline's shoes. But the Prioress advised her to return when she grew up. During this period of waiting, Thérèse adopted her sister Marie as her confidant. But shortly thereafter, Marie also entered the Carmel in Lisieux. Thérèse now had two pairs of shoes to fill.

We know the end of the story. Thérèse eventually entered the Carmel at the age of 16. She spent the last nine years of her life walking in the shoes of her sisters, and creating some big shoes of her own.

Today, we are challenged to walk in St. Thérèse's shoes. That challenge is different for each of us, but at the heart of each challenge is to live our lives, through its ups and downs, based on trust in our loving Lord. This was the hallmark of St. Thérèse's faith. Trust is easy to live by when the going is easy, but when the going gets tough, it can be a different story. It is during those times that our faith is tempered, like iron in fire, made stronger by the crosses we bear.

It can be a wonderful exercise to consider the shoes we walk in. Some shoes might feel too big, while others can feel too tight. But the shoes that fit the best are those fitted for faith, given to us by those who came before.

I can thank God for John's shoes; may God rest his soul. Whose shoes might you thank God for? 🌹

BY DAN PRITCHARD

THE Steps OF THE Soul

“Jesus, your arms are the elevator which will lift me to heaven!”

- ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

Stairs in Thérèse's childhood home in Alençon.

WE'D LIKE TO FOCUS ON ST. THÉRÈSE'S STEPS OF THE SOUL SPIRITUALITY, WALKING THE STEPS OF OUR LIFE, BY BEING PRESENT TO LIFE AS IT HAPPENS.

As a young girl, when her dad took her to the big city of Paris, Thérèse was fascinated when her eyes first saw a new invention, an elevator, so easily taking people up and down the floors. She wrote: *"We live in an age of inventions. We need no longer climb up a flight of stairs with great effort. I am determined to find an elevator to carry me to Jesus, as I was too small to climb the steep stairs of perfection. In Holy Scriptures, I sought the elevator I wanted, and I read: 'whoever is a little one, let them come to Me.'"*

In this loving movement of her soul to holiness and wholeness, Thérèse wrote: *"I always wanted to become a saint ... instead of being discouraged, I told myself that God would not make me wish for something impossible ... I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight."*

This innocent search for an easy way to God is Thérèse's famous metaphor of her "Little Way" spirituality – her humble attempts to soar into God's arms and heart. With childlike simplicity, confidence and hope, she celebrates littleness as the best means of holiness. In some ways, it is strange and contradictory, because as a Carmelite, she enters and expands a tradition of Carmelite spirituality, which her namesake St. Teresa of Avila celebrates as a journey, walking the steps of the soul through an interior castle to the glistening glory within. And her mentor, St. John of Cross, celebrates it as the Ascent of Mount Carmel through an interior tunnel of darkness seeking light.

Only a child sees through contradictions and integrates them in the way they walk and live.

Don't we all want easy ways to God – to what our hearts long for? Our human experience teaches us that

elevators are often fantasies – ways of denying the work of transformation and disconnecting or walking around in denial of the reality that God's beloved daughters and sons are called to. *Didn't Jesus say: "If anyone wishes to follow me, let them take up their cross"* – which means embracing reality, walking through the real world, climbing and descending stairways. The Steps of the Soul leads us to embrace the reality of our lives, as God sees it – not our fantasies, fears, projections, insecurities or imagination. Yes, it is all the work of God. God's grace works best with those who cooperate and help themselves as partners with Divine Love: the God Who reveals as "I am!"

One of the great lessons of the Little Flower's life is how she integrates the reality of the steps, descents, climbs and struggles of stairways with the faith experience of elevators – human effort and God's free, unconditional, uplifting love.

As a woman of the God's word, St. Thérèse knew the experience of Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 of a journey home to reconcile with his older brother Esau, whom he had betrayed, and of a stairway or ladder connecting heaven and earth, with movement up and down. This experience happens at Beth-el (the "house of God") and because Jacob engaged the steps of the risky journey, he was renamed Israel ("one who wrestles with God"). Thérèse's life teaches us how to ride elevators as we engage journeys and stairways, step by step, as the way we encounter and wrestle with God.

Paula D'Arcy reflects the wisdom that *"God comes to us disguised as our life."* Stairways were great teachers of Thérèse – how God was forming, steering, uplifting and defining her. Let us reflect on her significant steps

The Alençon Stairway of Confident Love

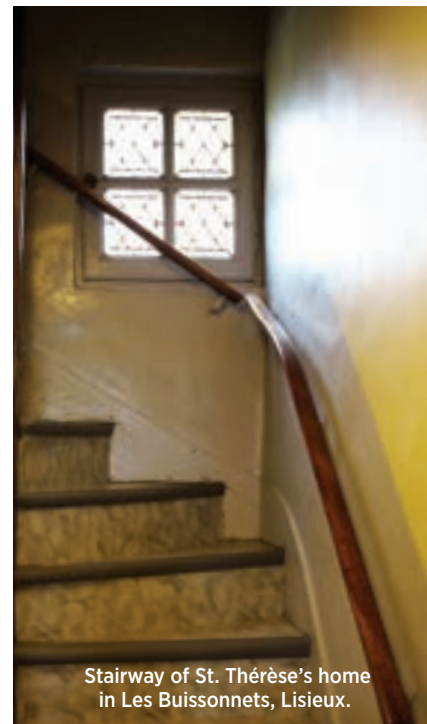
At Alençon, where she was born, there is her childhood stairway, near the living room, going upstairs to their bedrooms. Thérèse, being a high-maintenance child who needed attention, went up and down those stairs so often. Her mom, Zélie Guérin, writes that she developed a delightful but frustrating habit of dramatic exits upstairs and entrances downstairs. When told to go to upstairs, say her prayers and go to bed, young Thérèse would run to the stairway, step on the first step and cry out *"Mama, Mama!"* If Mama did not respond, *"Yes, my child?"* she would not go any farther. Only when she heard *"Yes, my child"* did she take the next step. She did this on every step. Young Thérèse was not going to climb the stairway alone and unnoticed. That her mom, dad, and even her sibling sisters played along with her little game and catered to her need to be noticed and responded to her every step is such a great testimony of love. This response of her mother and family became the container of love by which young Thérèse would learn in the most human way that she was beloved – by others and ultimately by God. So ascending and descending steps were human ways of developing a strong self-image: of being grounded in love; of belonging; of not being invisible; of being known and loved, which is critical to human and Divine intimacy and love. These stairs experienced so much. They were stairs of transformation and growth: her having to go to bed earlier than she wanted; frequent and prayerful trips upstairs to visit her mom as she was dying; mornings of anticipation and evenings of despair and hurt feelings. Yet, they were all a stairway cathedral of love where holiness would blossom as she grew up. Somehow the *"yes, my child"* echoed God's love on every step – and young Thérèse heard it often enough to believe it, despite the insecurities, sensitivities and fears that could haunt her. This Alençon stairway was the cradle of her learning to trust love, which became the elevator of trusting Jesus.



Sometimes I cry when I relive this childhood stairway experience of Thérèse because my mom and dad were loving, but very challenging. In childhood, they loved us (me) so much they wanted us to succeed and try harder. But instead of listening to the love expressed in their challenge, I walked the way of feeling inadequate and not being good enough. Thérèse listened to and absorbed the loving “yes, my child” and developed that inner security and safety of confident love. She knew she was beloved of God. Like many of us, I still yearn and strive to believe this incredible good news and confidence of truly being loved.

Les Buissonnets Stairway of Conversion, Transformation and Personal Responsibility

After her mom died, her Papa, Louis Martin, moved the family to Les Buissonnets in Lisieux. These were challenging times for young Thérèse – the loss of her mother, a deepening and touchy sensitivity and ability to be easily hurt and disappointed, a scrupulous soul, the loss of Pauline (her security blanket third mother) leaving to become a Carmelite nun, the constant sickness and longing melancholy, and the cruel betrayal by classmates and friends ravaged her soul. Spoiled child that she was, Thérèse expected Jesus to be the



Stairway of St. Thérèse's home in Les Buissonnets, Lisieux.

easy elevator to lift her beyond all this abandonment, loss, self-pity and cruelty. She seemed lost and on a detour at times amid easy and many tears. The desire to be holy, good and perfect was strong and elusive. At times she took self-centered steps to protect herself from the disappointments of life. Her late childhood and early adolescence were not an easy walk for Thérèse. She was hard on herself and even deflected the enormous outreach of others, because she got lost, as we all can do, walking detouring steps of her own expectations, darkness, insecurities, exiled from her own goodness, blessedness and love. The steps into adulthood were a difficult climb.

Just before her 13th birthday, on Christmas Eve 1886, she prayed at Midnight Mass to the Infant Jesus to be generous in giving herself to Him and be a wholehearted saint. We all need to be careful what we pray for. Returning home to Les Buissonnets, she looked at the fireplace where she would place her shoes to be filled with presents. She overheard her Papa, who was frustrated that she still did childish things, say: “I hope this is the last year! When is she going to grow up!” She was crushed and hurt; tears flooded her eyes. But rushing up the steps to her room, she had a

miracle conversion. She basically heard Jesus say (in modern idiom): “Thérèse, get over yourself – it’s not about you!” She experienced an inner strength that echoed the simple physical experience of climbing those familiar steps. A liberating elevator swept through her soul and lifted her from self-centered grief and sensitivity. Instead of sulking in self-pity, she wiped away her tears and courageously went down the stairs and excited her Papa with grateful delight for all the goodies he had put in her shoes. Her focus was on him and pleasing him – not herself. Thérèse was freed. She explained: “I felt charity enter my soul and the need to forget myself ... the work I had been unable to do the last 10 years was done by Jesus in one instant.” She had to trust this challenge from heaven, which was a major adjustment. Carmelite St. Teresa of Avila, Thérèse’s namesake, taught that self-knowledge is critical to enter the interior castle of our soul where the Divine Spark softly glows.

Jesus had awakened her and gave her what she had asked for – but Thérèse had to take personal responsibility for not allowing the darkness to define her and learning to live from the light that is God’s love in Jesus. It is all about God’s initiating and ever-present love, but we have to accept our responsibility to change our mindset and false self-images, to allow God to work, transform and break out of us. God’s unconditional love and mercy do not overwhelm or force us, but rather frees us and our human freedom and responsibility to make choices spirited by Jesus.

The Buissonnets stairway experience was one of conversion, self-emptying and transformation – an elevator experience to a new level of life with steps to adulthood and a mature sense of responsibility to make a difference in the world. She came away transformed to love: a burning and thirsty desire to save souls and be for others. From being a self-centered spoiled child, she was transformed into someone who knew she was connected to everyone – and felt the responsibility to be connected with them in prayer, in Christ. She embraced the sufferings of the world. She dedicated her life to saving souls,

praying for them – “to be love in the heart of the Church.” It was the steps and stairway into the second half of her life – a stairway she was so familiar with but finally awakened to its invitation to what she always desired.

This early adolescence experience of awakening always touches my life. I can get so caught up in myself, my dreams, hopes and hurts, that I miss the big picture – thinking life and God’s will are all about me. We can be so self-centered and burdened by the disappointments of life, perceived grievances, wounds, and unmet expectations. As much as I don’t like them, I’ve learned to be grateful for wake-up calls from my childish selfishness to an adult reverence and focus on others, including the effects of my behavior on other people. It is a huge jump and stretch for me to stop playing the victim and walking in self-pity even over hurts and grievances that only exist in my imagination. Often the confrontations to my ego have been painful but freeing wake-up calls: elevators that freed me from heavy self-created burdens and darkness. No one knew it at the time, but this step was halfway through Thérèse’s 24 years of life. How many of us have experienced wake-up calls in the second half of our lives!

The Lisieux Carmel Stairway of Surrender

Thérèse felt the call to become a Carmelite nun, as Pauline had done. She persisted despite opposition from the Prioress, the Priest-Chaplain and even the local Bishop that she was too young and not ready. She even appealed to the Pope, knowing that he was at the top of the Church stairway. Finally, she was received, dressed in bridal beauty as she

“

I felt charity enter my soul and the need to forget myself...”

was giving her life to her Beloved. The Carmel was not all she had romantically expected. Some of the other nuns irritated her and even looked down on her as too simple or childlike. Her room was on the second floor. Several times a day, she would deliberately, silently, and attentively climb up and down this stairway for community prayer and activities. This winding stairway was an important part and reflection of her life.

Despite the great dreams that called her to be a missionary, priest, doctor and warrior, she learned to be “love in the heart of the Church – my vocation is love.” She learned to integrate all the various pulls of life into being where she was – where God had planted her, those who walked with her, and with whom God had placed her. She tried not to live from the false self and ego-expectations, which can try to define us all. She prayed: “It is your arms, Jesus, which are the elevator to carry me to heaven. So there is no need for me to grow up. In fact, just the opposite: I must become less and less.” She was living her “Little Way of spiritual childhood” – the spirituality of trust and confidence.

We can imagine times she ran up these steps or slowly walked down. Her steps were unique, one of the gardeners had mentioned. She had made her Oblation to Merciful Love. She had desert experiences of the dark nights of the senses and spirit. As her TB progressed, she looked into emptiness. God was purifying and raising her beyond the self-serving ego needs of earning salvation by work, prayers and suffering, lacking intimacy and notice, to a self-emptying trust and surrender to Divine goodness and intimacy.



Spiral stairs at LeCarmel.

The last 18 months of her life, she experienced the absence of God. It was painful and frightening for a person whose supposed value came from being seen and noticed. In faith and hope, she tried to trust the Presence within the absence! The nuns noticed her struggle to climb those stairs to her room. One evening, it took her almost one half hour to climb those steps. She never complained, just stopped again on each step to catch her elusive breath before she could make the next step. She did not cry out, but, as in her childhood, she must have silently said: "Jesus! Jesus!" – and silently heard "yes, my child," which gave her strength in the faith awareness that she was not alone or abandoned. Over nine years she had walked and run up and down these stairs. Now they were the final challenge and metaphor of her life of surrender to Divine love, within and beyond her. Jesus was her elevator carrying her through each struggling breath.

Thérèse was moved downstairs and isolated to the infirmary, never to climb again. As every last consolation of body and spirit was taken from her, including her ability to receive Holy Communion,

she learned that "Everything is Grace" even as her body weakened and bled. Amid the darkness, her final words were: "My God, how I love You!" She had told the sisters: "It is into God's arms that I am falling! I'm afraid I have feared death. Now I am not afraid of what happens after death. ... I am not dying – I am going to Life!" She still believed that Jesus was her elevator.

This stairway of surrender has been a constant challenge in my life. I'm a high energy guy and my dad taught me to work hard and give my best. Driven by a self-created sense of inadequacy, I work hard. I'm constantly striving and need to do it myself – to take that next step – always proving myself – exhausting myself and others as a driven man. Only later in life am I learning to surrender to the experience of being loved and lifted out of the inadequacy that was defining and driving me. I finally was so weak and tired that I heard and listened to the "yes, my child" and surrendered to the God Who defines me as His beloved son. It was like a powerful elevator transported me to some new heights of identity, freedom, responsibility and light. Yes, it was a death to long held self-definition and a driving ego. Now it is life, even though it continues to be a struggle. I stand on the steps with Thérèse. Amidst the darkness of my long recovery from spinal surgery, all she ever said to me was "trust God!" It is all about surrender and getting over ourselves!

I suspect we all have these steps, stairways and elevators in our life experience, as "God comes us to disguised as our life." Thérèse can teach us how to walk, climb and descend in faith and enjoy the elevator ride – knowing it is all Beth-el, the beloved house of God we are walking, climbing and living in. She had to walk every step even as the elevator was carrying her – to be present to the reality of her life, where God dwells and reveals. Spirituality and faith are awakening to the truth and realizing in gratitude that all good that happens to and by us is actually God working in and through us. Jesus is truly the Elevator of our humanity.

Our Prayer:

Gentle Thérèse, teach me to walk in your footsteps – to follow your little way of trust, transformation and surrender. Teach me to be childlike enough to let Jesus be the elevator Who raises me above the stairways of confusion, darkness, need, hurt and fear. Free me with your trusting spirit, so that I might be lifted up above all that weighs me down and makes my heart heavy. When I try to carry everything and climb by myself, life gets heavy and stairways seem impossible. Empower me to walk and climb the Steps of the Soul, which you did so well.

Save me from thinking that I must do all the work of salvation. Give me your innocent trust so that I can throw myself into God's arms. Lift the scars, burdens, grievances, and fears of my heart. By His death on the cross, Jesus saved us – His outstretched arms connect us with God. Like you, Little Flower, I want to trust that I am God's child. Instill confidence in me that I will allow God to lift me in His strong arms. Let Jesus be my elevator this day. Make me light again so that I can fly to the heights of God's embrace like you, gentle St. Thérèse, my friend. I want to join you on the uplifting ride! Awaken me to the confidence, trust, conversion, transformation, surrender and personal responsibility. Help me be a dependent and trusting child of God like you on all the stairways of my life and steps of my soul. 🌹

First Steps

I don't remember my first steps. I know they led to my first time running, the first time I jumped and touched the door jam and then the ceiling, the first time I rode my bike, hit a ball, made a three-pointer, and scored a goal. But I don't quite know exactly how this all came to be.

Do you remember your child's first step? It's such a simple moment, yet one filled with such joy and celebration. You have helped this vulnerable, small ball of love reach this milestone that signals that you are doing something right and that they will have a lifetime of amazing opportunities unfold before them. Though we children don't often know how we get there, you do. You and your loved ones had followed the Little Way, carrying out small task after small task with great love, to help your child reach this momentous occasion.

I don't remember my first spiritual step. Yet, on May 14, 2022, the same day Titus Brandsma was canonized, I found myself at the entrance of the National Shrine of St. Thérèse waiting to be ordained a Carmelite priest. Words cannot describe how humbling this experience was for me. As I greeted my loved ones, I tried to speak, but realized we couldn't bring ourselves to do much more than share a hug as our eyes met through wells of tears of joy and love. At this moment, it hit me. The joy I felt was not mine alone. My vocation to Carmel was not mine alone. It was that of my community. The community that took each step with me on my spiritual journey and showed me how to share Christ's love with others, how to listen to God's voice – and my own. Though I don't remember my first spiritual step, I know my Father does. 🌹



A LITTLE Soul



Ah! Thérèse was a little soul
with a childlike trust in God.
She recognized her littleness,
her nothingness.
She owned it.
It wasn't a weakness after all.
It turned out to be a great strength.
Humility *par excellence*.
That's what made room
for God to work in her life.
We all need that.

She accepted God's mercy
and forgiveness,
and trusted in God's abundant love.
Did she ever!
She struggled much, had many setbacks.
But she continued
to persevere in her faith.
Dedicated every moment of her life to God.
Even when her life was filled
with doubts, anxieties, failings, pain.
And yet, she was able to proclaim,
'all is grace'.
Many of us would proclaim otherwise
That's why she's a saint.

Total union with Jesus is what she desired.
And she wanted it now.
Not a step or a stair or a ladder
She wanted an elevator
to lift her up to Jesus.
She felt too little to climb
that rough stairway of perfection.
Yet she did it through many trials and tribulations.
What an example!

In this Year of Hope,
we thank God for the example
and the intercession of St. Thérèse.
Thank God that she reminded us
that You, O God, are everywhere,
in our every human experience.
And that is so comforting.

And thank God that she reminded us
of our call to holiness.
How?
By doing ordinary things
with extraordinary love.
May we have her innocence and simplicity.
And see ourselves as a little soul
with a childlike trust in God.
It can make life easier,
and certainly more joyful.

-Father Gerard Power, O. Carm.



CARMELITES IN NIAGARA | 150 YEARS

Our Carmelites have a long history, dating back to the late 12th century on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. By 1300, we had 150 houses in Cyprus, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, England, Scotland and Ireland. And we were present in universities in Paris, London, Cologne, Florence, and Bologna. In 1864 two German Carmelites from Straubing, Bavaria established our first North American Foundation in Leavenworth, Kansas. And in 1875, the first Carmelites came to Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. And much water has gone over the Niagara Falls since that date. We have been here in Canada for 150 years. [Imagine, St. Thérèse was 2 years old when we came to Canada.] And now this property is home to the Canadian National Shrine of St. Thérèse! This is an exciting year for the Carmelites. And we will mark this anniversary with several events in May, June and October 2025. Our Carmelite Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary was established in 1890. And since then we have established and expanded our presence in Peru (1949), Mexico (1995), El Salvador (2007), and, most recently, Honduras (2022). All this is made possible through the generosity of you, our benefactors and donors. This gives us great hope for the future. Thank you.

STRUGGLES IN 2024

On Nov. 15, 2024, some 55,000 members of Canada Post went on strike. It brought all postal services to a halt, save the senior pension and government assistance cheques. At the writing of this article, it has been three weeks since the strike began. This has had a huge impact on small businesses, on charitable organizations, and, particularly, on the Society of the Little Flower in Canada, for this is one of our peak periods, and busiest times of the year. Sadly, many of you did not receive your mailings on time. This also cut into our annual membership appeal. Knowing how generous our benefactors and donors are, I am sure you will help us catch up in the New Year. So many of our Carmelite Formation Programs in several countries rely on our generosity every year. May God bless you for everything you can do, and may St. Thérèse continue to shower you with her Roses of hope and charity.



NEW VENTURE FOR CARMELITES IN THE PHILIPPINES

In April of 2024, the Carmelite Province of the Philippines sent a young Carmelite to assist in Canada. His name is Father Joiezl Pinon, O.Carm. At just 31 years old, he is filled with so much joy and energy as he ministers in the role of associate pastor of St. Patrick Church in Niagara Falls. Father Joi also assists us with Mass at the National Shrine of St. Thérèse. Pictured above are myself and Father Joi at St. Thérèse Feast Day celebrations in October 2024. May St. Thérèse, Patroness of the Missions, send us more vocations. 🌹



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

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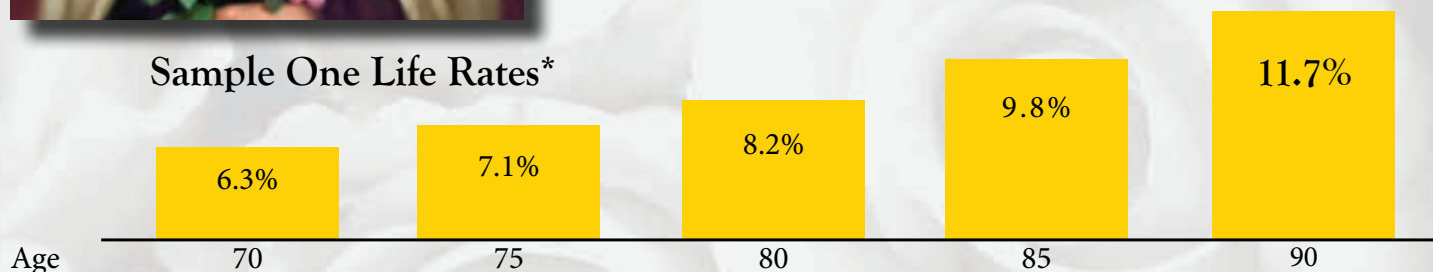
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