

Twelve Gardens of Stewardship

Garden of the Soul

St. Therese of Lisieux



St. Therese's legacy is a journal of her thoughts published after her death, titled 'Story of a Soul'. In it, Therese shows us how we can experience holiness in our everyday lives through what she calls her "little way" of joyfully practicing small daily sacrifices. Enjoy the gentle wisdom of this Saint.

Excerpts from 'Story of a Soul'
By St. Therese of Lisieux

A Wedding Invitation

Eight days after I had taken the veil my cousin, Jeanne Guérin, was married to Dr. La Néele. When she came to see us afterwards and I heard of all the little attentions she lavished on her husband, my heart thrilled and I thought: "It shall never be said that a woman in the world does more for her husband than I do for Jesus, my Beloved." And, filled with fresh ardour, I set myself more earnestly than ever to please my Heavenly Spouse, the King of Kings, Who had deigned to honour me by a divine alliance.

Having seen the letter announcing the marriage, I amused myself by composing the following invitation, which I read to the novices in order to bring home to them what had struck me so forcibly--that the glory of all earthly unions is as nothing compared to the titles of a Spouse of Our Divine Lord.

"God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, and the Glorious Virgin Mary, Queen of the Heavenly Court, announce to you the Spiritual Espousals of their August Son, Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, with little Thérèse Martin, now Princess and Lady of His Kingdoms of the Holy Childhood and the Passion, assigned to her as a dowry, by her Divine Spouse, from which Kingdoms she holds her titles of nobility--*of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face*. It was not possible to invite you to the Wedding Feast which took place on the Mountain of Carmel, September 8, 1890--the Heavenly Court was alone admitted--

but you are requested to be present at the Wedding Feast which will take place tomorrow, the day of Eternity, when Jesus, the Son of God, will come in the clouds of Heaven, in the splendour of His Majesty, to judge the living and the dead.

"The hour being still uncertain, you are asked to hold yourselves in readiness and watch."

A Proudful and Stubborn Girl!

The only one now left to speak of is Céline, the companion of my childhood. My memories of her are so many that I do not know which to choose. We understood each other perfectly, but I was much more forward and lively, and far less ingenuous. Here is a letter which will show you, dear Mother, how sweet was Céline, and how naughty Thérèse. I was then nearly three years old, and Céline six and a half. "Céline is naturally inclined to be good; as to the little puss, Thérèse, one cannot tell how she will turn out, she is so young and heedless. She is a very intelligent child, but has not nearly so sweet a disposition as her sister, and her stubbornness is almost unconquerable. When she has said 'No,' nothing will make her change; one could leave her all day in the cellar without getting her to say 'Yes.' She would sooner sleep there."

I had another fault also, of which my Mother did not speak in her letters: it was self-love. Here are two instances: --One day, no doubt wishing to see how far my pride would go, she smiled and said to me, "Thérèse, if you will kiss the ground I will give you a halfpenny." In those days a halfpenny was a fortune, and in order to gain it I had not far to stoop, for I was so tiny there was not much distance between me and the ground; but my pride was up in arms, and holding myself very erect, I said, "No, thank you, Mamma, I would rather go without it."

Another time we were going into the country to see some friends. Mamma told Marie to put on my prettiest frock, but not to let me have bare arms. I did not say a word, and appeared as indifferent as children of that age should be, but I said to myself, "I should have looked much prettier with bare arms."

Dreams of Making Devils Flee

But, dear Mother, I am forgetting myself--I must not tell you yet of my girlhood, I am still speaking of the baby of three and four years old.

I remember a dream I had at that age which impressed itself very deeply on my memory. I thought I was walking alone in the garden when, suddenly, I saw near

the arbour two hideous little devils dancing with surprising agility on a barrel of lime, in spite of the heavy irons attached to their feet. At first they cast fiery glances at me; then, as though suddenly terrified, I saw them, in the twinkling of an eye, throw themselves down to the bottom of the barrel, from which they came out somehow, only to run and hide themselves in the laundry which opened into the garden. Finding them such cowards, I wanted to know what they were going to do, and, overcoming my fears, I went to the window. The wretched little creatures were there, running about on the tables, not knowing how to hide themselves from my gaze. From time to time they came nearer, peering through the windows with an uneasy air, then, seeing that I was still there, they began to run about again looking quite desperate. Of course this dream was nothing extraordinary; yet I think Our Lord made use of it to show me that a soul in the state of grace has nothing to fear from the devil, who is a coward, and will even fly from the gaze of a little child.

Unrepentant Murderer

In order still further to enkindle my ardour, Our Divine Master soon proved to me how pleasing to him was my desire. Just then I heard much talk of a notorious criminal, Pranzini, who was sentenced to death for several shocking murders, and, as he was quite impenitent, everyone feared he would be eternally lost. How I longed to avert this irreparable calamity! In order to do so I employed all the spiritual means I could think of, and, knowing that my own efforts were unavailing, I offered for his pardon the infinite merits of Our Saviour and the treasures of Holy Church.

Need I say that in the depths of my heart I felt certain my request would be granted? But, that I might gain courage to persevere in the quest for souls, I said in all simplicity: "My God, I am quite sure that Thou wilt pardon this unhappy Pranzini. I should still think so if he did not confess his sins or give any sign of sorrow, because I have such confidence in Thy unbounded Mercy; but this is my first sinner, and therefore I beg for just one sign of repentance to reassure me." My prayer was granted to the letter. My Father never allowed us to read the papers, but I did not think there was any disobedience in looking at the part about Pranzini. The day after his execution I hastily opened the paper, *La Croix*, and what did I see? Tears betrayed my emotion; I was obliged to run out of the room. Pranzini had mounted the scaffold without confessing or receiving absolution, and the executioners were already dragging him towards the fatal block, when all at once, apparently in answer to a sudden inspiration, he turned round, seized the crucifix which the Priest was offering to him, and kissed Our Lord's Sacred Wounds three times. . . . I had obtained the sign I asked for, and to me it was especially sweet. Was it not when I saw the Precious Blood flowing from the Wounds of Jesus that the thirst for souls

first took possession of me? I wished to give them to drink of the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb that It might wash away their stains, and the lips of "my first born" had been pressed to these Divine Wounds. What a wonderful answer!

The Souls of Children

About this time Our Lord gave me the consolation of an intimate knowledge of the souls of children. I gained it in this way. During the illness of a poor woman, I interested myself in her two little girls, the elder of whom was not yet six. It was a real pleasure to see how simply they believed all that I told them. Baptism does indeed plant deeply in our souls the theological virtues, since from early childhood the hope of heavenly reward is strong enough to make us practice self-denial. When I wanted my two little girls to be specially kind to one another, instead of promising them toys and sweets, I talked to them about the eternal recompense the Holy Child Jesus would give to good children. The elder one, who was coming to the use of reason, used to look quite pleased and asked me charming questions about the little Jesus and His beautiful Heaven. She promised me faithfully always to give in to her little sister, adding that all through her life she would never forget what I had taught her. I used to compare these innocent souls to soft wax, ready to receive any impression--evil, alas! as well as good, and I understood the words of Our Lord: "It were better to be thrown into the sea than to scandalize one of these little ones."

How many souls might attain to great sanctity if only they were directed aright from the first! I know God has not need of anyone to help Him in His work of sanctification, but as He allows a clever gardener to cultivate rare and delicate plants, giving him the skill to accomplish it, while reserving to Himself the right of making them grow, so does He wish to be helped in the cultivation of souls. What would happen if an ignorant gardener did not graft his trees in the right way? If he did not understand the nature of each, and wished, for instance, to make roses grow on peach trees?

This reminds me that I used to have among my birds a canary which sang beautifully, and also a little linnet taken from the nest, of which I was very fond. This poor little prisoner, deprived of the teaching it should have received from its parents, and hearing the joyous trills of the canary from morning to night, tried hard to imitate them. A difficult task indeed for a linnet! It was delightful to follow the efforts of the poor little thing; his sweet voice found great difficulty in accommodating itself to the vibrant notes of his master, but he succeeded in time, and, to my great surprise, his song became exactly like the song of the canary.