



Carmelite News

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The Contagious Holiness of Thérèse

Louis and Marie-Zelie Martin, the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, will be beatified on Mission Sunday, October 19th, 2008. This act affirms the sanctity of married life and also highlights the reach of Thérèse's groundbreaking spirituality. Here we reflect anew on her contagious holiness, universally available for all people, for all time. What does the life of this Carmelite reveal to us in a civilization tinged with darkness, a culture no longer in touch with its traditional values, and a society where violence and greed threaten not only the human person but also our earth, our environment?

Thérèse lived the very ordinary lot of a Carmelite nun and died young, at age 24. Yet she whose life circumstances seem so confined and narrow now acts and influences widely, without bounds. She who had no formal advanced education now is a doctor of the church. As in the Gospel for her feast, one like a little child has become among the greatest. "I look upon myself as a weak little bird", she said, but "in spite of my littleness...my heart feels within it all the aspirations of an Eagle". Thérèse places irony and contrast before us in high definition, and these somehow form the sum and substance of her doctrine. "The smallest act of pure love is of more value than all other works together." Less is more. Little is great. In her we behold the power that lies in empty-handed presence before God.

Little, empty – it's easy to misinterpret these words. Thérèse became little, but not because she renounced material things, and not by failing to use or acknowledge her enormous talents and personal gifts. She didn't become little in a big, showy way – not in a way that would cause her to curve back on herself. She became little in little ways, by releasing what she -- and we -- most tightly possess: the threads of our lives, our possession of self in every daily interaction and choice. "[I did not allow] one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by the smallest things and doing them with love," she said. And so she remained silent when someone annoyed her, she spoke unpopular truths, she helped in thankless jobs – and then she saw the richness of those moments, the grace that flowed from them.

It is ironic: the deprived situation is full, and the enriched one is empty. Hers is a world of radical

reversals, where power is found in weakness, the last are first, and the poor are rich. While this may seem unreal, actually it is the truth of our lives, a truth the Church affirms in the beatification of Louis and Zelie. The smallest charity really does accomplish more than the grand gesture. How difficult it can be to give a look of love to someone who just annoyed us. Yet we all know from experience the power and transformation of a single graced moment like that. As Thérèse said, "with love I flew."

In some contexts one could find this idea trivial. The daily news brings to mind Edith Stein's poignant observation: "The world is in flames". The world is in flames, and here we speak about tiny gestures, looking with love at someone instead of giving vent to minor annoyance. But if the world is in flames, we need to fight fire with fire, and answer flame with flame -- but a different kind of flame: what Thérèse called "the secret of possessing God's flame", the flame of love. We respond to the world's violence, ironically, by loving in these small ways. This is not pious; it is real, it is hard. It is sacramental.

The American author Leslie Marmon Silko writes in her novel *Ceremony*, "as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of the story we have together." Thérèse is part of our story. With her upcoming feast and the beatification of her parents, now is a time to reflect deeply on her life, perhaps to read again her *Story of a Soul*. Let us believe more intensely in the graces of contemplative prayer, contemplative wisdom. Thérèse was a mystic and a revolutionary; she challenges us to follow closely in her steps.

YAP Redux

The members of our Young Adult Prayer (YAP) group gave this tribute at the end of the program's first year.

Each of us wants to thank this Carmelite community for the gift of YAP. Words really cannot even come close to expressing the gratitude each of us feels nor can they adequately describe the impact YAP has had on each of our lives.

A gift is most often something unexpected and filled with elements of surprise. Using that definition we feel that there is no better description of YAP than

that of gift. Certainly the first time each of us came to YAP we had no idea what to expect. Even after we became seasoned YAPpers we anxiously awaited each meeting to see what we were going to learn next. And then the elements of surprise were endless. To think back to where each of us was in September and then to see where we are now is really remarkable. In September spending thirty minutes in prayer was difficult and seemed endless. Now we see endless possibilities within those thirty minutes.

Over the past 9 months each of us has, in our own way, carried the joys, burdens and sufferings that life brings; yet we feel more centered, more grounded, more balanced, more free, more at peace. We feel a sense

of solidarity with each other and with those in the world whom we do not even know. We have a new understanding of prayer, a deeper love of God and, most importantly, a deeper knowing of ourselves.

And so we thank each of you. We thank you for the countless hours you spent preparing for each YAP session. The input for each meeting was amazing and the all of the take-home materials were wonderful and beautifully done. Yet it was your participation and your presence that meant the most to us. Your willingness to share glimpses of your own journey and your own struggles made all of this seem so real, so tangible, so attainable. You encouraged us along the way and quietly pointed us in a new direction. And for that we will be forever grateful.

YAP is the first "course" we have taken where there are no wrong answers, where the journey is more important than the destination and all that is required of us is that we simply show up; preferably on time.

You have taught us to persevere in our prayer, to search for, to find and to love the God dwelling within each of us. We come to Carmel not to get away from the world, but rather to embrace the world in a new way; a way of a greater love, solidarity and peace.



Drawing by YAP member

🌿 Calendar 🌿

Wednesday, October 1, Thérèse of Lisieux
Lauds 8 am, Vespers 5 pm, Eucharist 7 pm

Wednesday, October 15, Teresa of Avila
Lauds 8 am, Vespers 5 pm, Eucharist 7 pm

Thursday, November 27, Thanksgiving Day
Eucharist 9 am

Friday - Monday, February 14-16, 2009, Come & See:
Single women age 18-35 are invited to spend a weekend with us, living, praying, working, to try out life in Carmel.



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