

# Story of a Soul Online Study

Day 1/ May 1, 2017

My friends,

You are invited to join me and St Therese of Lisieux as we read her "Story of a Soul." We will read four pages a day with few exceptions (3rd edition as translated by Fr. John Clarke, OCD). I'll post my thoughts and humbly invite you to post yours.

Remember, that Facebook is public and the goal is to support one another in our journey of faith. If you have something private you would like to share, please see me in person or write to me via email (FrBill@StPaulChurch.com). (Sorry, I do not read Messenger.)

Also, please remember that this is my page and I will delete comments that are deemed offensive or overtly political. We want to keep our focus on the Little Way. Thank you for understanding.

All that being said, please read the Introductions to the editions. I REALLY enjoyed them!

In the Introduction to the First Edition, Father presents the mission of St Therese "to make God loved as I love Him, to teach souls my little way" ... "the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute surrender."

I enjoyed his presentation of the relevant Scripture, the history of the three manuscripts, and the development of the editions.

After reading it ... I feel so excited ... like I've just packed my bags to begin a wondrous spiritual journey! I can't wait to begin!

My prayer borrows on St Therese's on page xxii: "O Jesus! Cast Your Divine Glance upon my soul. I beg you to choose me to become worthy of Your Love!"

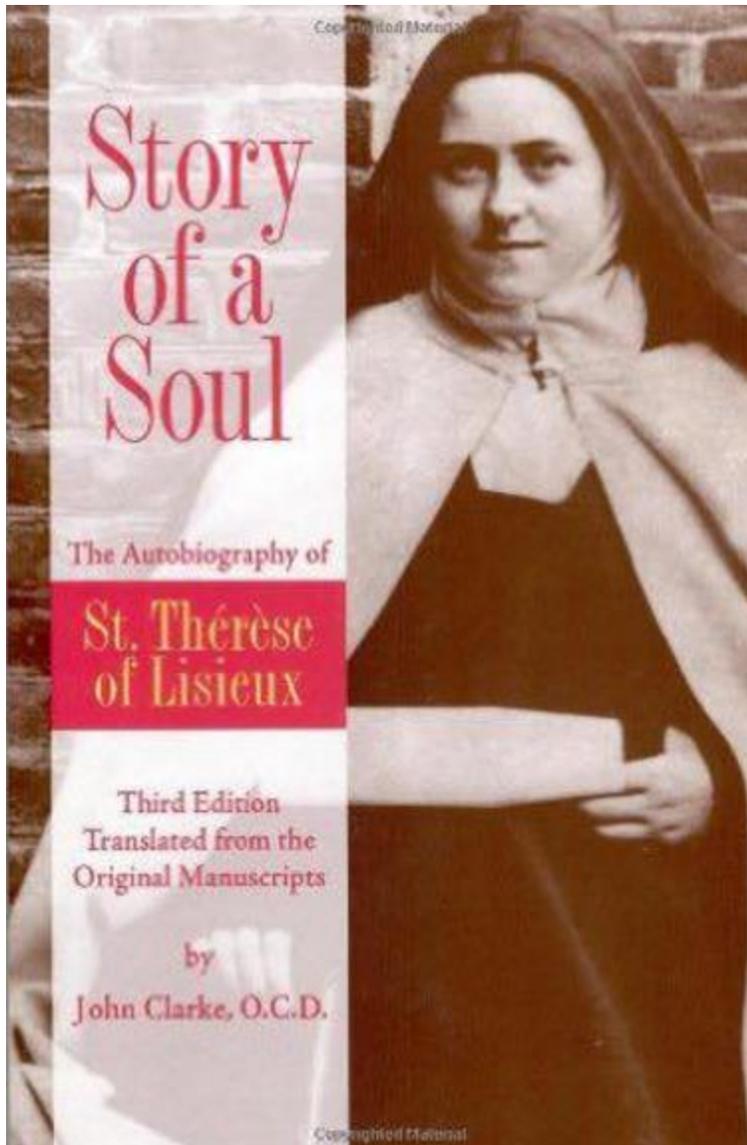
Tomorrow we will read the Prologue and her family tree.

A MORNING PRAYER WRITTEN BY ST. THERESE

O my God! I offer Thee all my actions of this day for the intentions and for the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I desire to sanctify every beat of my heart, my every thought, my simplest works, by uniting them to Its infinite merits; and I wish to make reparation for my sins by casting them into the furnace of Its Merciful Love.

O my God! I ask of Thee for myself and for those whom I hold dear, the grace to fulfill perfectly Thy Holy Will, to accept for love of Thee the joys and sorrows of this passing life, so that we may one day be united together in heaven for all Eternity.

Amen.



## Day 2

Today we read the Prologue of St Therese of Lisieux's "Story of a Soul." The Prologue describes St. Therese's family of origin. How appropriate as the family truly is one of the most important influences, if not the most important influence, in one's life.

St. Therese's family is proof that God writes straight in crooked lines. Both parents tried to enter religious life but were refused. They found themselves relatively late in life and began their family, conceiving 9 children, five of them surviving childhood.

Her parents, both now canonized, were both amazing people of faith, hope, and love. It was they who taught their daughters how to love God and care for those in need. And even in the midst of the mother's cancer, kept the light of hope burning brightly.

As we begin our journey together, let's pray for our families of origin as well as the families of those we love. May they be rooted in the love of God, nourished by the gentle rain of the Holy Spirit, and always reach towards the Sun ... the Son of God!

Question: What touched you most about the prologue?

Tomorrow we will read pages 13-16.

May God bless you!



Day 3

Today we begin the "Story of a Soul" in earnest, pages 13-16. I am struck by her confirmation that God does not call the worthy, but by His grace, makes worthy those He has called. That is certainly true in my life.

I also love the analogy of a the garden of souls and how the Lord takes delight in our differences. While some may be like a pure lily and others are more like fragrant roses, I think I may be more like an Indian paintbrush!

I think what is important here is that sometimes we feel that we must all be alike and wonder why we are not as holy, as kind, as bright, as attractive, as successful, as patient, as talented ... etc. ... as another ... the fact is that God made each and every one of us is different and each possesses unique qualities which God glories in.

Take time today to reflect on who you are in the garden of God and thank Him for all He has done to cultivate us ... to nurture us, protect us, and prune us so that we might reach our full stature in His garden. Let that be your song of praise.

God loves us ... not because we are worthy of His love ... but because we are His children. Blessed be our Merciful God!

For tomorrow, read pages 17-20.



#### Day 4

As we continue our journey with St. Therese in her "Story of a Soul" (p. 17-20), she shares her earliest memories with us. She was raised in a home full of love and it is clear that she was a very loving and strong willed child. I was especially struck by her reflection of her relationship to each of her siblings, especially Pauline (pg 20). It was through her sister that she first heard the call to be a religious.

As I reflected on her first memories, I also thought of my own. I too was blest with an amazing family, full of faith, love, and joy. While I realize now that it couldn't have been easy for my young parents, my memories could not be better and my heart could not be more grateful for the gift of my family.

How about you? My suggestion: take time today and reflect on your family. Offer a prayer for them and if they are still alive, reach out to them ..... write a letter or call. If your childhood was difficult, think of how God was there for you, loving and protecting you, so that you could develop into the amazing person you are today!

May God bless you!

Tomorrow we will read pages 21-24. (If you are reading a different edition, reach out to a friend and ask them to take a photo of page 24 so you know where to stop reading!)



## Day 5

Today we continue our reading of "Story of a Soul" by St. Therese of Lisieux as she recounts her earliest memories of a child, before the age of four.

Child development experts agree that the earliest years of our life are so very important as they constitute the foundation of our personality as well as mental and physical development. That being said, most, if not all of us, struggle to remember events before the age of four. What we do recall are usually photos, letters, or stories which we learned afterwards.

That being said, I think the point Therese is trying to make is that she was not the perfect child. Although she was bright and loving, she was also strong willed, self-absorbed, and prideful. Spoiled. Yet, and this is the important point, Jesus was watching over her, guiding her, and using even her character flaws to help her grow in holiness.

The same was true of us ... is true of us ... and will continue to be true of us! God uses the good as well as the not so good to form and shape us into the people He created us to be. We simply need to cooperate with His grace! Blessed be our Merciful God!

Today, reflect on how God has used all of your life experiences to help you grow into the person you are today. And if you can, reflect on how He continues to form you.

Have a wonderful Cinco de Mayo!

For tomorrow, let's read six pages and complete Chapter 1 (pages 25-30).



## Day 6

Today we finish the first chapter of "Story of a Soul" by St. Therese of Lisieux (pgs 25-30). She begins by sharing wonderful stories of her relationship with her sisters. As I read it, I couldn't help think of the wonderful times I had growing up with my siblings. I thank God for them and for the grace of growing up in a large family!

Her story, found on page 27, of choosing all of Leonie's toys is very important. As she notes, it constitutes a summary of her whole life. As we journey in the Lord, He offers us many opportunities to grow in sanctity and St. Therese encourages us to "choose all that God wills".

So often we hold back ... we fail to be open to all of His blessings ... we choose not to always follow His will ... we close ourselves off to His grace. Today, let us join the Little Flower in praying: "My God, 'I choose all!' I don't want to be a saint by halves, I'm not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my own will; so take it, for 'I choose all' that You will."

The remainder of chapter 1 is also important. it is true that a soul in a state of grace has nothing to fear from the Evil One and that our earliest years of life truly do imprint upon us. That is why it is so important to shower God's love upon our little ones.

Have a blessed day and please offer a prayer for all those who will be making their First Holy Communion today!

Tomorrow we will begin chapter 2, pages 33-36. (The photo is of St. Therese's parents Saints Louis and Zelig Martin).



Day 7

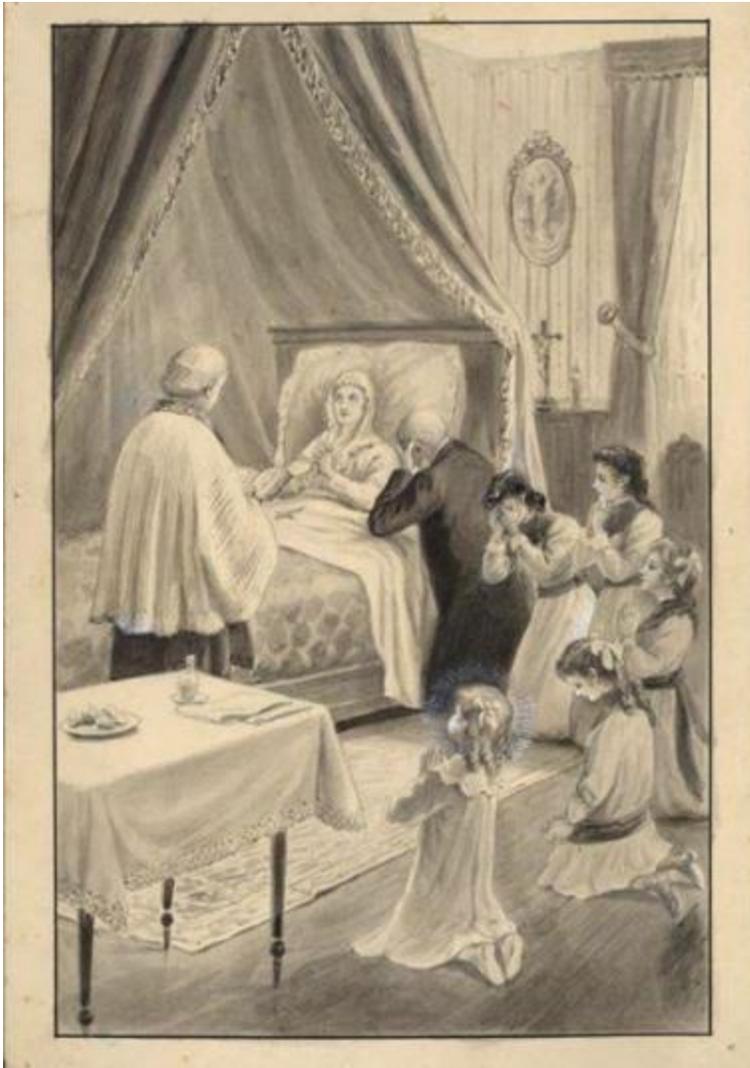
Today we begin chapter 2 of "Story of a Soul" by St. Therese of Lisieux (pg. 33-36). The Little Flower tells of the passing of her mother at the age of four and the effect on her life. Her world was truly thrown upside down and her personality changed as she became "timid and retiring, sensitive to an excessive degree." Thankfully, our Merciful God blest her with a wonderful family to shower love upon her through this difficult time. It was at this time that she moved to her familiar home in Lisieux.

The fact is that, while God does not CAUSE bad things to happen to us, He USES all of life experiences to mould and shape us and gives us the gifts required to help us overcome adversity. Think of a difficult experience you had as a child (or adult) and how God was present to assist you to not only overcome, but grow as a result of it. Let that be your prayer.

I hope to see you today and please join me in offering a prayer of thanksgiving for our First Communicants and Fr. Bob as he celebrates his 25th anniversary!

Tomorrow, we continue with pages 37-40.

May God bless you!



## Day 8

As St Therese of Lisieux continues her "Story of a Soul," she recounts stories of her childhood (pgs. 37-40). I dare say we all have stories of her childhood. What struck me was her memory of her First Reconciliation. While I don't remember mine, I feel so much joy and peace whenever I avail myself of this amazing Sacrament of grace. It is truly a gift from God.

I encourage you to go to confession at least once a month and as we approach the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of our Blessed Mother in Fatima, let us make the commitment to observe the next six first Saturdays ... confessing our sins, fully participating in Mass and receiving the Blessed Sacrament, praying the rosary with the intention of peace, the conversion of the world, and in atonement for all our sins.

Tomorrow we will read pages 41-44. I hope to see you this Thursday at 7pm for our information meeting on next year's pilgrimage to Lithuania and Poland next year so we may grow in Divine Mercy. Also, come on Friday for our healing Mass at 7:30pm. Lastly on Saturday, after the 5:30pm Mass for the Rosary in honor of Our Lady of Fatima!



Day 9

Today, as we read pages 41-44 of St. Therese of Lisieux's spiritual autobiography "Story of a Soul," I am struck by her recollections of Sundays and the importance of faith in her family.

Like St. Therese, Sundays were always special days for the Swengros family. It was the day to sleep a little longer, to feed the animals, eat breakfast, get dressed up for Mass, load up in the station wagon, take the long trip into town for Mass, and if we were good ... to get donuts and rolls afterwards!

The rest of the day was always more relaxed as it truly was "the Lord's day" - the sabbath. It was a "family day." My parents worked very hard and while we still had farm chores to do on Sundays, it was a day of rest from the other work and duties which occupied so much of our time.

We did have a television but the reception was extremely poor so we spent a lot of time entertaining ourselves with games, music, and reading. I'm so thankful for my family.

The other thing that impressed me by St Therese's journal is the role her father played. Studies have confirmed over and over the importance of a father in the life of a child ... physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Our first image of God is that of our father. And if the father practices his faith by praying every day, attending Mass each and every weekend, and modeling the faith through his daily decisions, the children are more likely to embrace a similar relationship with the Lord.

As we prepare for Mother's Day this weekend, let us offer a prayer for both our parents, our siblings ... indeed our entire family. Let us also pray for families in crisis. May God bless them all!

I invite you in your comments to share a family story with us. And for my siblings ... if you are reading this ... please confirm what I have written! 😊:)

Tomorrow, please read the rest of chapter II (up to page 49).



Day 10

Today we finish the second chapter of St Therese of Lisieux's "Story of a Soul" (p. 45-49).

She shares a lot about her relationship with her dad and some fond memories. What struck me was her recollection of her vision. I've been blest with many of these and find that they are always revelatory. God often speaks to us through our visions and dreams. Although she didn't have a spiritual director to help her understand what she saw, the meaning became clear with the passing of time. The vision was meant to prepare her for the future and to bring her comfort in her hour of need. I love it when God does that! 😊)

On another note, I am very grateful for all the memories you have posted. It is wonderful to think of how God has blest us. For those of you who had difficult childhoods, it is awe-inspiring to contemplate how God used even those painful times to shape you into such amazing disciples. Thank you for your "yes" to Him!

St Therese felt God's presence at the sea. So do I. Also in the mountains, in the desert, in the forest, ... how about you. Is there a special place you like to go to encounter the Lord?

Tomorrow we continue with the first four pages of chapter III. May God bless you!



### Day 11

Today we continue our journey with St. Therese of Lisieux's "Story of a Soul" as she shares stories of her youth. I think we can all relate to her stories: the challenges of relating to peers at school and the wonderful memories of time with our friends and siblings.

St Therese's stories brought a smile to my face as I recall the many wonderful memories of my youth. God has been so good to me.

Today, let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all the blessings we have received, especially in our youth. And if possible, do something to bring a smile to the children we meet throughout our day. For tomorrow, read up to page 60.

May God bless you!



### Day 12

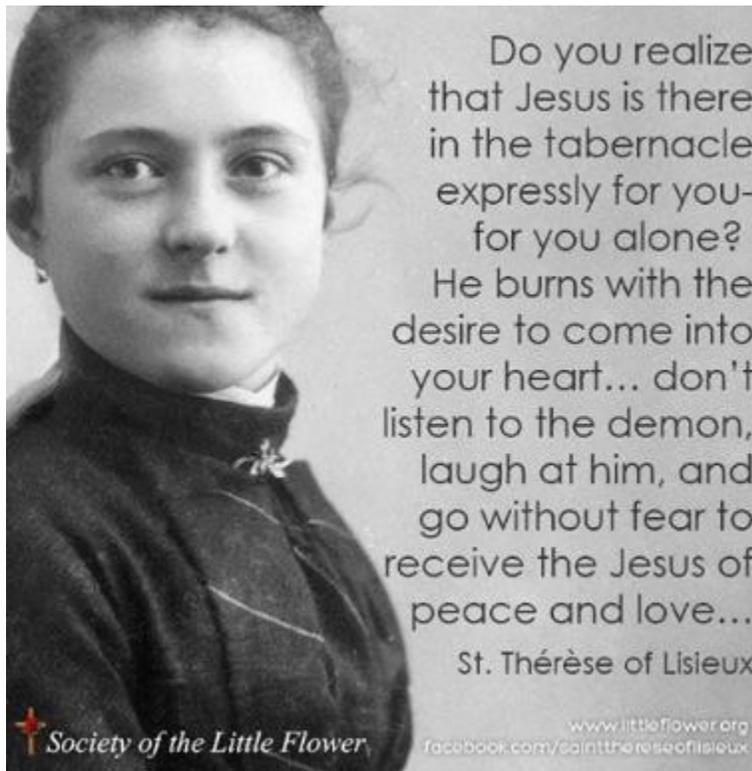
"Story of a Soul" continues with St Therese of Lisieux sharing her impressions of her sister Celine's First Holy Communion, Pauline's entrance into Carmel, and the onset of her illness (p. 57-60).

I was touched for her love for the Eucharistic Lord and her call at such an early age to enter Carmel. Her desire was to love and serve God with every fiber of her being.

I was also touched by her understanding of the redemptive nature of suffering. While pain and illness are not of God, it is amazing how He can use pain and suffering to help us to grow ... if we are open to the grace.

Today, let us offer a prayer for those who are suffering ... and for us as we bear our crosses, that they may help us to grow ever closer to God and more attentive to the plight of others. Amen!

Tomorrow - pages 61-64.



Day 13

Today, we join the Little Flower as she relates her suffering during her childhood illness (Story of a Soul, pages 61 -65). I would be most interested in hearing from you who are medical professionals, what illness you felt she might have suffered ...

For her part, St. Therese believed that the physical illness might have had a psychological component as well as a spiritual dimension. This I don't doubt. As Catholics, we believe we are a unity, mind, body, and soul. A physical illness will effect us emotionally as well as spiritually. It is also true that an emotional trauma may have physical and spiritual ramifications. Lastly, if we are experiencing a spiritual crisis, it should not be surprising that we also suffer physically and psychologically.

What is interesting is how God used this trial to help Therese to grow in holiness. Note that He didn't CAUSE her illness and He certainly gave her the graces and blessings she needed to endure her "real martyrdom" of her soul.

Have you had experiences like that? For me, it was older sister's accident. It changed my life as I came to know the power of prayer, god's love and mercy, and how, in the spiritual life, there are no such thing as coincidences. What do you think?

Today, let us join our Lady in praying the Rosary for peace in the world and for conversion of hearts. We will pray the Rosary following the 5:30pm Mass tonight (5/13/17). Also, be sure to the end of chapter 3 for tomorrow!

May God bless you!



Day 14

Today we also finish Chapter 3 of "Story of a Soul." St. Therese shares the story of her miraculous healing as the result of the prayers of her sisters. It was their prayer ... from the depths of their being ... and the intercession of Our Lady of Victories which made all the difference.

I remember when my sister and her young family was in a tragic car accident. We all stormed heaven. I remember that was the first time I truly prayed with all of my heart ... the miracles which flowed, thanks to the intercession of the Little Flower, continue to amaze and inspire me. God is so good to us!

Do you have a story to share? I hope so! Tomorrow we begin Chapter IV, pages 71-74. May God bless you and may God bless all our mothers!



Day 15

Today we begin chapter IV of St Therese's "Story of a Soul" (pages 71-74). It is chock full of spiritual nuggets for us to reflect on ... her vision, insight into sanctity, preparations for First Holy Communion, and mental prayer ...

"I always feel, however, the same bold confidence of becoming a great saint because I don't count my merits since I have none, but I trust in Him who is Virtue and Holiness. God alone, content with my weak efforts will raise me to Himself and make me a saint, clothing me in His infinite merits."

St Therese, ever aware of her littleness, tries her best to follow God's will, and trusts completely in Him. This is her "Little Way."

What is amazing to me is how God uses the events of our lives ... positive and negative to help us grow in holiness. In today's reading He taught St Therese mental prayer, the value of delay of gratification, and the saving grace of sacrifice and suffering. What is God teaching you today?

Tomorrow we read 75-78.



Day 16

Today we read of St Therese's First Holy Communion (Story of a Soul, pages 75-78). Oh what joy! I was impressed by her retreat and her personal preparations. Her description of her First Holy Communion is so beautiful:

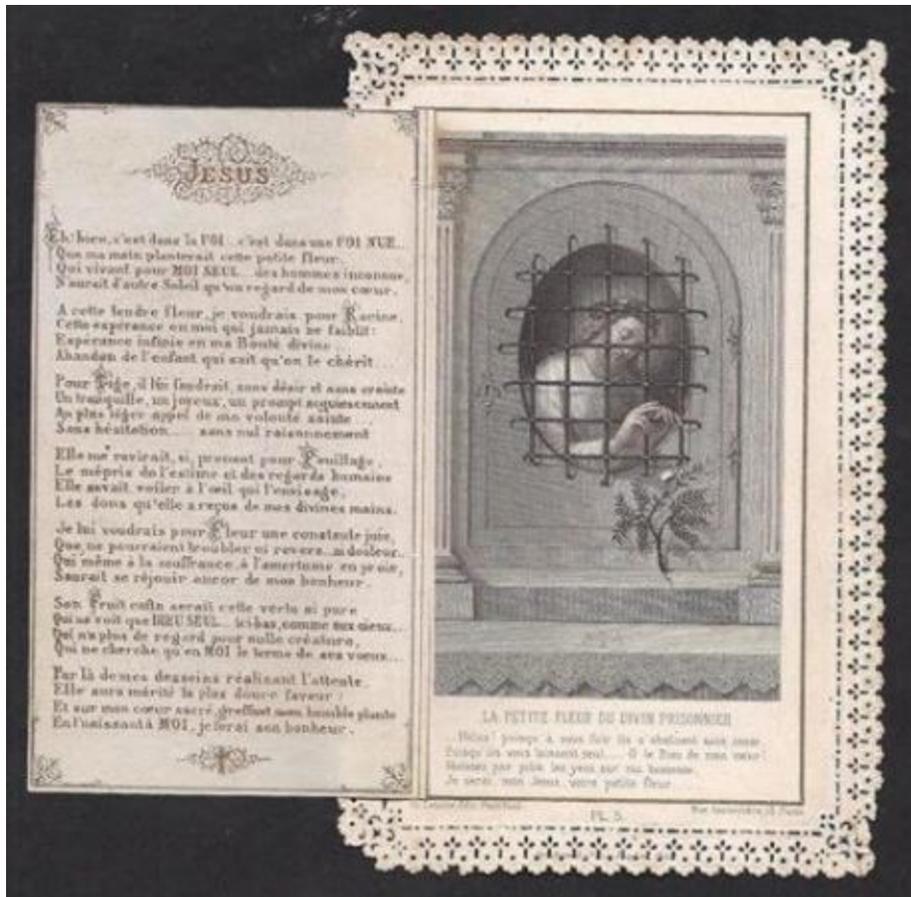
"Ah! How sweet was that first kiss of Jesus! It was a kiss of love; I felt that I was loved, and I said: "I love You, and I give myself to You forever!" There were no demands made, no struggles, no sacrifices; for a long time now Jesus and poor little Therese looked at and understood each other. That day, it was no longer simply a look, it was a fusion; they were no longer two, Therese had vanished as a drop of water is lost in the immensity of the ocean. Jesus alone remained; He was the master, the King."

How beautiful!! May we always receive Holy Communion with such devotion!

For tomorrow, please read pages 79-82.

May God bless you.

(Below is an image of "The little flower of the Divine Prisoner.")



Day 17

As we continue on our journey through "A Story of a Soul" by St. Therese of Lisieux, I want to thank you for your comments. I'm always amazed at how God is working through our little community of faith and your thoughtful comments are helpful to me as well as to all those who read them. One word of caution, remember that we are all on our own journey. No one is "ahead" or "behind." We are exactly where we need to be at that point in time. We need to trust in the Good Shepherd that He will lead us on the way He has chosen for us, in His own time. Amen? Amen!

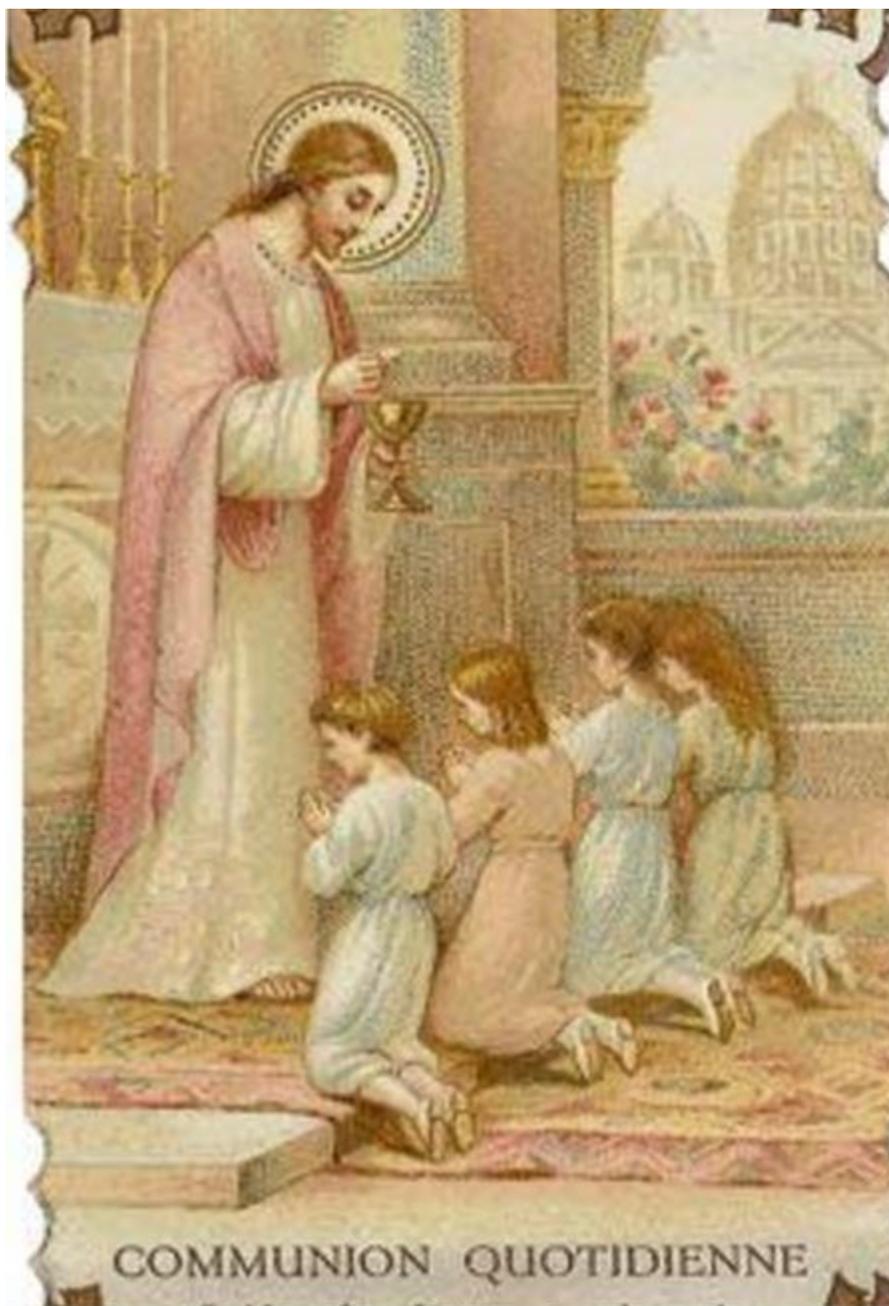
What impressed me in today's reading was St Therese's love for the Eucharist (pgs 79-82). I also had forgotten how unusual it was for people to receive Holy Communion frequently. For me, I can't imagine not receiving the Blessed Sacrament every day. I think I'm addicted! 😊)

That being said, I don't understand her "great desire to suffer." Personally, I think there is enough suffering in the world. I try my best to alleviate it! I think it shows her special vocation to be a "victim soul."

I do share her love for the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of Confirmation - "sacrament of Love." I also appreciate the isolation she felt from her peers. "God gave me a heart which is so faithful that once it has loved purely, it loves always." Amen!

What moved you in today's readings? How will it affect your life today? Tomorrow, pages 83-86.

God bless you!



Day 18

Today St Therese invites us into her heart (Story of a Soul, pages 83-86). I think many of us can relate to her feelings.

Like St. Therese, growing up, my closest companions were my family. School friendships seemed so transitory. As I entered adolescence, Jesus became my closest friend. I'd spend hours alone walking through the woods, working on the farm, and playing my musical instruments. It was during those years that I really developed a personal and intimate relationship with the Lord.

I also firmly believe that the Lord is the one who continues to preserve me from sin. If it wasn't for His mercy and grace, I'm sure I would be a VERY different person today. "I am who I am by the grace of God" (1 Cor 15:10).

Thankfully, I have not been plagued by being over scrupulous but I do know many who have. It is a difficult cross to bear and really takes a wise mentor or spiritual director to walk the fine line between over-scrupulosity and a zeal for holiness. It is important to remember that God loves us unconditionally and while it is possible to unknowingly do wrong, it is not possible to unknowingly sin.

On a final note, today is my 26th anniversary of priesthood. Please keep me in your prayers that I may continue to grow in holiness. Thank you!

Reflect on your relationship with God and invite Him to help you grow head over heels in love with Him!

Tomorrow, we read pages 87-90.

Have a good day!

## Day 19

As we continue to read

"Story of a Soul" by St Therese of Lisieux, we read of the lessons she learned as a twelve year old. It was in her solitude that she really developed a personal relationship with Jesus her "only friend." She also continued to battle her over scrupulosity and to reject the desire to imitate others. I was also touched by her efforts to create a prayer space in her home (pages 87-90).

If you don't consider the Lord to be your closest friend, I encourage you to invite him into your heart. Talk to him as you would a friend. Grow ever closer to Him! He is waiting for you!

We should all also have a prayer space or chapel in which we can comfortably and safely rest in God without undue distractions. If you don't have one, designate one today!

May God bless you! Tomorrow we will read to the end of chapter IV.

