

+ Maria

October 1, 2014 – St. Therese of the Child Jesus

My dear Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel - I am very happy to share this wonderful Feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus with all of you, and to mark here in Avila, the patronal feast of Little Flower Novitiate. John Beevers who translated and presented the very popular Autobiography of St. Therese in the 1950's, entitled his work "A Storm of Glory" – a title which shows the paradox of St. Therese, dubbed the Little Flower by the Scottish parish priest Canon Taylor – pastor of Mother Angeline's own parish – that the Little Flower, who emphasized a little way, and little virtues, and her own littleness, created a storm when she finally appeared on the scene at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. She created a storm in focusing the whole Church and world on God's merciful love and our spiritual childhood. I sometimes wonder if Carmel would have become in the 20th century what it became, or whether there would even be Carmelite Sisters for the Aged & Infirm, if Our Lord didn't grace the little saint of Lisieux as he did, and if she didn't cooperate with graces given her. Mother Angeline came to know of the Little Flower and to love her, and she prayed to her and shared with Therese the desire to become a saint, even going so far as to praying that she might see St. Therese in this life! For sure, the visit of the Carmelite, Father Dionysius Flanagan to Our Lady's Home in the Bronx with blessed roses on October 3, 1928, was a providential moment that we all know the results of. Happy Feast Day!

During the recent General Chapter, the Congregation faced into the issue of being women of the Church in this time when we are all called to the New Evangelization, a call first issued by Christ to spread the gospel to the end of the world, and then brought forward by St. John Paul II, and echoed by Pope Francis. To be evangelizers we must be witnesses. We must love Christ and the Church and we must know our place in the Church. As the sons and daughters of Elijah, we are meant to live a prophetic religious life- prophetic in life style, prophetic in faith, and prophetic in the message we pass to the world. As the sons and daughters of Mary, the Mother of the Church, we are to

bring Jesus to life over and over again in the Church and in the world, once again, by our living of our religious life, and by what we give witness to. Carmel is always related to the heart of the Church, to the soul of the Church.

Therese of the Child Jesus, finally, found her vocation in the Church: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love.” Not just love, but BE love, be God-like in the Church, for God is love. We too must renew our place in the Church, a place we haven’t lost or a place we don’t know, but must always be renewed and made fresh. A place that always must be purified and strengthened so that we don’t become middle class or boring but authentic and alive.

St. Therese wrote, “I am a daughter of the Church. I do not ask for riches or glory, not even for the glory of heaven. My own glory will be the reflection of the Church’s glory. But I ask for love. My one thought, Jesus, is to love you. Great deeds are forbidden me. I can neither preach the gospel nor shed my blood – but what does it matter? Others labor while I, a little child, stay close to you and love you for all those who are in strife.” These words are filled with such depth and irony. These words came from the very soul of St. Therese and there is no mistaking the attitude contained therein. “Unless you become like a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Therese experienced great love in her family. She was pampered lovingly, and called by her father, “The Little Queen”. But that little queen also knew great suffering and great loss through various painful separations in her life. Interiorly, she was being hollowed out, and struggled with terrible sensitivity, until the gracious moment of her conversion when charity entered her heart. From then on, she sailed forward in the midst of every conflict and trial, grounded in God’s merciful love. She came to understand that God, like a mother or father, and like a river, lets flow love and peace in abundance, to the point of overflowing, and she rejoiced to have received this gift. She was God’s child, the recipient of that immense love filled with mercy, and she wanted nothing more than to return that love to God, particularly by being merciful and loving with her neighbor. No – Therese did not die the death of a missionary martyr like her hero St. Theophane Venard or St. John of Arc. No- Therese did not preach any sermons in any churches. But, within her own Carmel, she became

increasingly love itself, a love forged in the furnace of give and take among her Carmelite Sisters and her family. She asked for love, because God is love, and she would love like God as best as she could. She even rejected glory because, as a daughter of the Church, she was satisfied and happy to be part of the Church. The beauty of the Church was her beauty, the love of the Church was her love, and the glory of the Church was her glory. In the end, she was a martyr of love, dying painfully of tuberculosis in the odor of great holiness, and after her death until today, she preaches eloquently the gospel of love, mercy and spiritual childhood through her writings and worldwide reach.

St. Therese whom we honor today deserves our love, our veneration and our prayers. She is a great teacher and a marvelous example both for the novices in Little Flower Novitiate and for us veterans as well. We can ask her to help us know how to be daughters and sons of the Church today. We remember her with singing, and prayers and blessed roses. Thoughts of Therese bring us back to the center of our vocation. As Carmelites, we are to follow Jesus Christ with pure hearts and with good consciences in all of our life. A heart is made pure to the degree that it is prepared for love and is filled with love. St. Therese reminds us, helps us and teaches us to love – with humility and child-like openness and trust. “All is confidence” she wrote, and when we feel ourselves getting hard, or bored, or overwhelmed, she invites us back to love and to confidence, quite simply and silently. Our glory (that is, our fulfillment) should not be in personal gain or achievement. Our glory should be always for the Church, the Body of Christ, of which our Congregation and Order are integral parts.

St. Therese wrote, “Of what avail are my roses and my songs? Yet I know my shower of petals and my songs of love from my heart will be pleasing to you. You, O God, will use them for the Church.” Our love, our deeds, and our songs must be for the Church too, and the Little Flower can teach us and help us to be more loving, more merciful, more peaceful people and more generous Carmelites for the sake of the Church our Mother.

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Avila-On-Hudson
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