



THERESIAN  
ANNIVERSARIES  
2023-2025

**Reading the writings of Theresese of the Child Jesus  
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025  
2024: Manuscripts B and C**



Text 4:  
**The little way**  
(Ms. C, 2v-3v)



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Suggestion for the community meeting:

1. Read the text together
2. One of those present, having prepared a contribution in advance, discusses the text using the commentary (and other aids, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be helpful to have made individual readings and reflections on Therese's text before the community meeting.

## MANUSCRIPT C, 2v-3v

You know, Mother, I have always wanted to be a saint. Alas! I have always noticed that when I compared myself to the saints, there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and the obscure grain of sand trampled underfoot by passers-by. Instead of becoming discouraged, I said to myself: God cannot inspire unrealisable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.

We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched, then, in the Scriptures for some sign of this elevator, the object of my desires, and I read these words coming from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: "Whoever is a LITTLE ONE, let him come to me." And so I succeeded. I felt I had found what I was looking for. But wanting to know, O my God, what You would do to the very little one who answered Your call, I continued my search and this is what I discovered: "As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breast, and upon my knees I shall caress you." Ah! never did words more tender and more melodious come to give joy to my soul. The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.

O my God, You surpassed all my expectation. I want only to sing Your mercies. "You have taught me from my youth, O God, and until now I have declared Your wonderful works. And until old age and grey hairs, I will continue to announce them." What will this old age be for me? It seems this could be right now, for two thousand years are not more in the Lord's eyes than are twenty years, than even a single day.

Ah! don't think, dear Mother, that your child wants to leave you; don't think she feels it is a greater grace to die at the dawn of the day rather than at its close. What she esteems and what she desires only is to please Jesus. Now that He seems to be approaching her in order to draw her into the place of His glory, your child is filled with joy. For a long time she has understood that God needs no one (much less her) to do good on earth.

## **Introduction to the text:**

'The grain of sand' (Ms C, 2v): this symbol, much favoured by Therese since March 1888, had disappeared since the time of her profession (8/9/1890) and reappears here. We know that Therese liked to use grand opposites: mountain/grain of sand corresponds to eagle/little bird in Manuscript B.

'God cannot inspire unrealisable desires' (Ms. C, 2v): this is one of the great wellsprings in the life and thought of Therese, the theme of desire is a deep dynamic in her writings.

'A little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.' (Ms. C, 2v): this is the only place in her writings where Therese speaks of a 'little way'. The well-known expression 'spiritual childhood', while not false, was never used by Therese. For her, the important thing was let herself be led, to surrender herself to events. Her only desire was to give pleasure to Jesus. But she continues the battle. She tries to control herself, not to yield to her weaknesses, to give pleasure to others. But she does it now in gratitude for God's free gift of love, rather than to earn that love.

She does it for the good of others and no longer to achieve personal perfection. Thus, when she falls short in those efforts, she rejoices, because her awareness of being little can grow, and she can receive even less deservedly the love of God.

‘An elevator’ (Ms. C, 3r): Celine wrote to her sisters from Paris on 11/5/1887: ‘We have been in the elevators, it is very entertaining.’ When the disease gained ground, climbing the staircase to go to her cell was a real torture, and Therese was then transferred to the infirmary, which was on the ground floor.

‘The rough stairway of perfection’ (Ms. C, 3r): in *The Dark Night*, John of the Cross described the ‘ten degrees of the ladder of love’ to climb to God.

‘If someone is very little’ (Ms. C, 3r) : already cited by Therese as an essential element of the ‘little way’, with the underlying theme of Isaiah 66:12-13 : ‘You will be suckled, carried on her hip and fondled in her lap. As a mother comforts a child, so I shall comfort you.’

## For community discussion:

1. *What is the text saying?* Understanding the content and initial meaning of Therese’s text
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Discern the present-day relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual. . .) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me/us?* Consider the personal and community relevance of the text.

The purpose of this process is to allow Therese to speak to us herself, to question and encourage us, and to open us up to her clarifying and confirming our own personal and community path. The questions suggested are only indicative, and could perhaps be used in individual meditation and community sharing.

## *Questions:*

1. What does Therese rely on to nourish her research? How do we tackle our personal and community research and discernment?
2. Based on the fundamental experience of the deep gulf between our desire and the reality of our limitations, what attitudes does Therese invite us to cultivate?
3. Spiritually, in our relationship with Jesus, what are the differences between what Therese indicates with the symbols of the staircase and the elevator? What would be the necessary and sufficient condition to enter into the elevator? What would bring us out of it? Read LT 143, as a support for the path of our collaboration with grace, even when we are confronted with our limitations and our incapacity.
4. How does this text clarify the Theresian way of understanding what is true sanctity? Note the final insistence on spiritual poverty, linked with the account of the discovery of the little way.



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