



TERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025

Reading of the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025
2023: Manuscript A



Study guide 4:
Prayer for Pranzini
(Ms A, 45v-46v)

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Proposal for the Community meeting:

1. Reading of the text.
2. One of the participants, who has already prepared his contribution, presents the text with the help of the reading schedule (and other supports, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be good if the community meeting was preceded by a personal reading and meditation on the text of Therese.

MANUSCRIPT A, 45v-46v

[ICS pp. 99 – 101]

One Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling to the ground without anyone's hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew. I understood I was then to pour it out upon souls. The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: "*I thirst!*" These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls*. As yet, it was not the souls of priests that attracted me, but those of *great sinners*; I *burned* with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames.

To awaken my zeal God showed me my desires were pleasing to Him. I heard talk of a great criminal just condemned to death for some horrible crimes; everything pointed to the fact that he would die impenitent. I wanted at all costs to prevent him from falling into hell, and to attain my purpose I employed every means imaginable. Feeling that of myself I could do nothing, I offered [46r°] to God all the infinite merits of Our Lord, the treasures of the Church, and finally I begged Céline to have a Mass offered for my intentions. I didn't dare ask this myself for fear of being obliged to say it was for Pranzini, the great criminal. I didn't even want to tell Céline, but she asked me such tender and pressing questions, I confided my secret to her. Far from laughing at me, she asked if she

could help convert *my sinner*. I accepted gratefully, for I would have wished all creatures would unite with me to beg grace for the guilty man.

I felt in the depths of my heart certain that our desires would be granted, but to obtain courage to pray for sinners I told God I was sure He would pardon the poor, unfortunate Pranzini; that I'd believe this even if he went to his death without *any signs of repentance* or without *having gone to confession*. I was absolutely confident in the mercy of Jesus. But I was begging Him for a "*sign*" of repentance only for my own simple consolation.

My prayer was answered to the letter! In spite of Papa's prohibition that we read no papers, I didn't think I was disobeying when reading the passages pertaining to Pranzini. The day after his execution I found the newspaper "*La Croix*." I opened it quickly and what did I see? Ah! my tears betrayed my emotion and I was obliged to hide. Pranzini had not gone to confession. He had mounted the scaffold and was preparing to place his head in the formidable opening, when suddenly, seized by an inspiration, he turned, took hold of the *crucifix* the priest was holding out to him and *kissed* the *sacred wounds three times!* Then his soul went to receive the *merciful* sentence of Him who declares that in heaven there will be more joy over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance!

I had obtained the "*sign*" I requested, and this sign was a perfect replica of the [46v^o] grace Jesus had given me when He attracted me to pray for sinners. Wasn't it before the *wounds of Jesus*, when seeing His divine *blood*

flowing, that the thirst for souls had entered my heart? I wished to give them this *immaculate blood* to drink, this blood which was to purify them from their stains, and the lips of my "*first child*" were pressed to the sacred wounds!

What an unspeakably sweet response! After this unique grace my desire to save souls grows each day, and I seemed to hear Jesus say to me what he said to the Samaritan woman: "*Give me to drink!*" It was a true interchange of love: to souls I was giving *the blood of Jesus*, to Jesus I was offering these same souls refreshed by the *divine dew*. I slaked His thirst and the more I gave Him *to drink*, the more the thirst of my poor little soul increased, and it was this ardent thirst He was giving me as the most delightful drink of His love.

God was able in a very short time to extricate me from the very narrow circle in which I was turning without knowing how to come out.

Introduction to the text:

As our Carmelite brother François-Marie L  thel affirms: «This story is one of Therese’s most beautiful texts, one of the strongest concerning Hope in Infinite Mercy in the apparently most desperate situation. In its simplicity and freshness, this text is very rich from the theological point of view, on the mystery of the Redemption and the Church’s cooperation with this mystery. It unites the points of view of faith, hope and charity, but with hope the dominant point. The starting point is a simple image of Jesus Crucified and Mary Magdalene embracing his feet, according to traditional iconography».

« I thirst» (Ms A, 45v): Jesus’ thirst on the cross, his blood shed, awakens in Therese the «thirst for souls», the desire to «purify them from their stains», which will instil in her the bold actions and fiery thoughts related in the following pages (up to 46v), in a «true interchange of love», such as the consequences of the «grace of Christmas» and the contemplation of Christ, dead for sinners.

«As yet, it was not the souls of priests that attracted me» (Ms A, 45v): Therese was to say on September 2, 1890, during the canonical examination that preceded profession: «I came to save souls and especially to pray for priests» (Ms A, 69v) [ICS p. 149]. During the Process, C  line amusingly said, «She called this kind of apostolate working in the wholesale trade, since through the head, it reached the members». The trip to Rome marked a decisive turning point: «Having never lived close to them, I was not able to understand the principal aim of the Reform of Carmel. To pray for sinners attracted me, but to pray for the souls of priests whom I believed to be as pure as crystal

seemed puzzling to me! (Ms A, 56r) [ICS 122]. In Carmel, Therese will never forget this first vocation.

«Condemned to death for some horrible crimes» (Ms A, 45v) [ICS 99]: Thirty-one years old Henri Pranzini had slit the throats of two women and a little girl in a robbery, on March the 17th, 1887, at rue Montaigne in Paris. His trial began on the 9th of July of the same year and ended on the 13th of July with his death sentence. It was then that Therese must have been passionate about his conversion because the criminal did not seem to show remorse or ask for forgiveness. For Therese, it was a question of preventing him at all costs «from falling into hell». At a time when Catholicism was strongly imbued with fear of God's judgment, the teenager's privileged weapons were prayer and a trust intimately linked to the mercy of the Father.

« All the infinite merits of Our Lord » (Ms A, 46r) [ICS 99]: Therese liked to emphasize the infinite character of Jesus' merits. Her description of the Pranzini episode is very close to her Act of Offering.

Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face would never then cease to pray for the salvation of sinners and would speak of Pranzini as her «first child». The young Carmelite would remain anchored in mercy until her last breath.

For the community dialogue:

1. *What does the text say?* Understanding the content and primary meaning of Therese's text.
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Grasping the relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual...) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me / us?* Making relevant and applying the text to personal and community life.

The purpose of doing things in this manner is to allow Therese to speak to us, to question us, to encourage us, and to welcome her to shed light upon and confirm our personal and community journey. The questions proposed are therefore only indicative and can possibly accompany personal meditation and community sharing.

Questions:

1. We can only be struck by the spiritual connection between her Christmas grace (text 3) and this account. We see in this text a double level: There is certain of God's merciful action and at the same time she asks him for a sign. How do we give meaning to these two dimensions: certainty and the need of a sign? Is it the same in our prayer life, what is it here that Therese comes to shed light upon for us?
2. We see how the bond between Christ and Therese grows, as she receives from Jesus her mission, in union with him. In the end, what is the part Therese plays, what is that of Jesus? Does this speak to us in our way of living our missionary commitment in prayer?
3. Therese and Pranzini share in admittedly very different circumstances the same essential spiritual reality, which consists in consenting to let oneself be saved by Christ and recognizing oneself as gratuitously saved by his love. What place does this experience have in my life? In the lives of the people I meet? How is this expressed?



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