



**THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025**

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



Schedule 1:
Singing the mercies of the Lord
(Ms A, 2r-4r)

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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, 2r-4r

*Springtime story of a little white flower
written by herself and dedicated to the Reverend Mother
Agnes of Jesus.*

It is to you, dear Mother, to you who are doubly my Mother, that I come to confide the story of my soul. The day you asked me to do this, it seemed to me it would distract my heart by too much concentration on myself, but since then Jesus has made me feel that in obeying simply, I would be pleasing Him; besides, I'm going to be doing only one thing: I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: "*The Mercies of the Lord.*"

Before taking up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary (the one that has given so many proofs of the maternal preferences of heaven's Queen for our family), and I begged her to guide my hand that it trace no line displeasing to her. Then opening the Holy Gospels my eyes fell on these words: "And going up a mountain, he called to him men of his *own choosing*, and they came to him" (St. Mark, chap. III, v. 13). This is the mystery of my vocation, my whole life, and especially the mystery of the privileges Jesus showed on my soul. He does not call those who are worthy but those whom He *pleases* or as St. Paul says: God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will show pity to whom he will show pity. So then there is question not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy" (Ep. to the Rom., chap. IX, v. 15 and 16).

I wondered for a long time why God has preferences, why all souls don't receive an equal amount of graces. I was surprised when I saw Him shower His extraordinary favors on saints who had [2v] offended Him, for instance, St. Paul and St. Augustine, and whom He forced, so to speak, to accept His graces. When reading the lives of the saints, I was puzzled at seeing how Our Lord was pleased to caress certain ones from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their way when coming to Him, helping them with such favors that they were unable to soil the immaculate beauty of their baptismal robe. I wondered why poor savages died in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced.

Jesus deigned to teach me this mystery. He set before me the book of nature; I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the Lily do not take away the perfume of the little violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers.

And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden. He willed to create great souls comparable to Lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at his feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be.

I understood, too, that Our Lord's love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul who resists His grace

in nothing as in the most excellent soul; in fact, since the nature of love is to humble oneself, if all souls resembled those of the holy Doctors who illumined the Church [3r] with the clarity of their teachings, it seems God would not descend so low when coming to their heart. But He created the child who knows only how to make his feeble cries heard; He has created the poor savage who has nothing but the natural law to guide him. It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself. These are the wild flowers whose simplicity attracts Him. When coming down in this way, God manifests His infinite grandeur. Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it. And just as in nature all the seasons are arranged in such a way as to make the humblest daisy bloom on a set day, in the same way, everything works out for the good of each soul.

Perhaps you are wondering, dear Mother, with some astonishment where I am going from here, for up till now I've said nothing that resembles the story of my life. But you asked me to write under no constraint whatever would come into my *mind*. It is not, then, my life, properly so-called, that I am going to write; it is my *thoughts* on the graces God deigned to grant me. I find myself at a period in my life when I can cast a glance on the past; my soul has matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trials. And now, like a flower strengthened by the storm, I can raise my head and see the words of Psalm 22 realized in me: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still wa-

ters; he restores my soul. Even though I walk through the valley of [3v] the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me..." To me the Lord has always been "merciful and good, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps. 102, v. 8).

It is with great happiness, then, that I come to sing the mercies of the Lord with you, dear Mother. It is for you alone I am writing the story of the *little flower* gathered by Jesus. I will talk freely and without any worries as to the numerous digressions I will make. A mother's heart understands her child even when it can but stammer, and so I'm sure of being understood by you, who formed my heart, offering it up to Jesus!

It seems to me that if a little flower could speak, it would tell simply what God has done for it without trying to hide its blessings. It would not say, under the pretext of a false humility, it is not beautiful or without perfume, that the sun has taken away its splendor and the storm has broken its stem when it knows that all this is untrue. The flower about to tell her story rejoices at having to publish the totally gratuitous gifts of Jesus. She knows that nothing in herself was capable of attracting the divine glances, and His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her.

It was He who had her born in a holy soil, impregnated with a virginal perfume. It was He, too, who has her preceded by eight Lilies of dazzling whiteness. In His love He wished to preserve His little flower from the world's poisoned breath. Hardly had her petals begun to unfold when this divine Savior transplanted her to Mount Car-

mel where already two Lilies, who had taken care of her in the springtime of her life, spread [4r] their sweet perfume. Seven years have passed by since the little flower took root in the garden of the Spouse of Virgins, and now three Lilies bloom in her presence. A little farther off another lily expands under the eyes of Jesus. The two stems who brought these flowers into existence are now reunited for all eternity in the heavenly Fatherland. There they have found once again the four Lilies the earth had not seen develop. Oh! may Jesus deign not to allow a long time to pass on these strange shores for the flowers left in exile. May the Lily plant be soon complete in Heaven!

I have just summed up in a few words, dear Mother, what God did for me. Now I will go into detail about the years of my childhood. I realize that here where others would see nothing but a tedious recital, your *motherly heart* will find some facts that are charming. Besides, the memories I'm about to evoke are also yours since my childhood unfolded near you, and I have the good fortune to belong to Parents without equal who surrounded us both with the same cares and the same tenderness. Oh! May they bless the littlest of their children and help her to sing the divine mercies!

Introduction to the text:

Here is the proposal for the first text: we are right at the beginning of Manuscript A (the information given here is taken from the notes of the new edition of the Centenary, Cerf-DDB 1997).

« The story of the little flower picked by Jesus» (Ms A, 3v) runs through the whole of Manuscript A. Therese's love for flowers is reflected in her personal history: the "little white flower", is the saxifrage that her father plucked from a wall and offered to her when she confided her vocation to him (Ms A, 50v).

The theme of Mercy echoes throughout the entire manuscript, up to the last pages consecrated to the Act of Offering to Merciful Love. The term *mercy* recurs twenty-nine times in the autobiographical manuscripts..

When Therese speaks of the statue of Mary (Ms A, 2r), it is the "Virgin of the Smile", which today surmounts the tomb of Saints Louis and Azelie Martin, Therese's parents, who had a particular devotion to this statue. It plays an essential role in Teresa's life, curing her of her serious childhood nervous illness (Ms A, 29v-31r) and accompanying her in her last agony in the infirmary (starting on 8 July 1897). In January 1895, it had been placed in the antechamber of Therese's cell.

«The nature of love is to humble oneself» (Ms A, 2v): immediately, Therese gathers here many of her great themes, and this becomes one of the essential "gestures", images of love, of divine grace, which recurs twenty-four times in her writings.

When Teresa sighs “May the Lily plant be soon complete in Heaven” (Ms A, 4r), at the moment in which she writes, “three Lilies” are in Carmel with her (Marie, Pauline and Celine) and another is blossoming at the Visitation convent in Caen (Leonie). “The two stems now reunited for all eternity” mean her parents, who “have found the four Lilies”, the four siblings who died at a tender age.

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. Teresa has a vocabulary that uses symbols a lot. In this section, the symbolism of the flower is very present. How do these symbols speak to us? Today, in our eagerness to proclaim the Gospel, what are the symbols that would seem most appropriate to us? What would we suggest?
2. Therese tells us that she is preparing to sing God's mercies in her life. She thus testifies that spiritual maturity is linked to the expression of our gratitude to God. What actual space do we give to the acceptance of Mercy? How can we help the world experience Mercy?
3. A couple of times in the text Therese speaks of God's preferences. How can we use this to discover all of "those favoured by God"?



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