



TERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025

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



Text 5:
The trial of faith
(Ms. C, 4v-7v)

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The trial of faith (Ms. C, 4v-7v)**

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, 4v-7v

Dear Mother, you know well that God has deigned to make me pass through many types of trials. I have suffered very much since I was on earth, but, if in my childhood I suffered with sadness, it is no longer in this way that I suffer. It is with joy and peace. I am truly happy to suffer. O Mother, you must know all the secrets of my soul in order not to smile when you read these lines, for is there a soul less tried than my own if one judges by appearances? Ah! if the trial I am suffering for a year now appeared to the eyes of anyone, what astonishment would be felt!

Dear Mother, you know about this trial; I am going to speak to you about it, however, for I consider it as a great grace I received during your office as Prioress.

God granted me last year, the consolation of observing the fast of Lent in all its rigor. Never had I felt so strong, and this strength remained with me until Easter. On Good Friday, however, Jesus wished to give me the hope of going to see Him soon in heaven. Oh! how sweet this memory really is! After remaining at the Tomb until midnight, I returned to our cell, but I had scarcely laid my head upon the pillow when I felt something like a bubbling stream mounting to my lips. I didn't know what it was, but I thought that perhaps I was going to die and my soul was flooded with joy. However, as our lamp was extinguished, I told myself I would have to wait until the morning to be certain of my good fortune, for it seemed to me that it was blood I had coughed up. The morning was not long in coming; upon awakening, I thought immediately of the joyful thing that I had to learn, and so I went over to the window. I was able to see that I was not mistaken. Ah! my soul was filled with a great consolation; I was interiorly persuaded that Jesus, on the anniversary of His own death, wanted to have me hear His first call. It was like a sweet and distant murmur that announced the Bridegroom's arrival.

It was with great fervor that I assisted at Prime and the Chapter of Pardons. I was in a rush to see my turn come in order to be able, when asking pardon from you, to confide my hope and my happiness to you, dear Mother; however, I added that I was not suffering in the least (which was true) and I begged you, Mother, to give me nothing special. In fact, I had the consolation of spending Good Friday just as I desired. Never did Carmel's austerities appear so delightful to me; the hope of going to heaven soon transported me with joy. When the evening of that blessed day arrived, I had to go to my rest; but just as on the preceding night, good Jesus gave me the same sign that my entrance into eternal life was not far off.

At this time I was enjoying such a living faith, such a clear faith, that the thought of heaven made up all my happiness, and I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions when they denied the existence of heaven, that beautiful heaven where God Himself wanted to be their Eternal Reward. During those very joyful days of the Easter season, Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys. He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment. This trial was to last not a few days or a few weeks, it was not to be extinguished until the hour set by God Himself and this hour has not yet come. I would like to be able to express what I feel, but alas! I believe this is impossible. One would have to travel through this dark tunnel to understand its darkness. I will try to explain it by a comparison.

I imagine I was born in a country that is covered in thick fog. I never had the experience of contemplating the joyful appearance of nature flooded and transformed by the brilliance

of the sun. It is true that from childhood I heard people speak of these marvels, and I know the country I am living in is not really my true fatherland, and there is another I must long for without ceasing. This is not simply a story invented by someone living in the sad country where I am, but it is a reality, for the King of the Fatherland of the bright sun actually came and lived for thirty-three years in the land of darkness. Alas! the darkness did not understand that this Divine King was the Light of the world.

Your child, however, O Lord, has understood Your divine light, and she begs pardon for her brothers. She is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You. Can she not say in her name and in the name of her brothers: Have pity on us, O Lord, for we are poor sinners! ... Oh! Lord, send us away justified... May all those who were not enlightened by the bright flame of faith one day see it shine... O Jesus! if it is needful that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul who loves You, then I desire to eat this bread of trial at this table, until it pleases You to bring me into Your bright Kingdom. The only grace I ask of You is that I never offend You!

What I am writing, dear Mother, has no continuity; my little story which resembled a fairy tale is all of a sudden changed into a prayer, and I don't know what interest you could possibly have in reading all these confused and poorly expressed ideas. Well, dear Mother, I am not writing to produce a literary work, but only through obedience, and if I cause you any boredom, then at least you will see that your little child has given proof of her good will. I am going to continue my little comparison where I left off.

I was saying that the certainty of going away one day far from the sad and dark country had been given me from the day of my childhood. I did not only believe this because I heard

it from persons much more knowledgeable than I, but I felt in the bottom of my heart real longings for this most beautiful country. Just as the genius of Christopher Columbus gave him a presentiment of a new world when nobody had even thought of such a thing; so also I felt that another land would one day serve me as a permanent dwelling place. Then suddenly the fog that surrounds me becomes more dense; it penetrates my soul and envelops it in such a way that it is impossible to discover within it the sweet image of my Fatherland; everything has disappeared! When I want to rest my heart fatigued by the darkness that surrounds it by the memory of the luminous country after which I aspire, my torment redoubles; it seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: "You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the eternal possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog that surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness."

Dear Mother, the image I wanted to give you of the darkness that obscures my soul is as imperfect as a sketch is to the model; however, I don't want to write any longer about it; I fear I might blaspheme; I fear even that I have already said too much.

Ah! may Jesus pardon me if I have caused Him any pain, but He knows very well that while I do not have the joy of faith, I am trying to carry out its works at least. I believe I have made more acts of faith in this past year than through my whole life. At each new occasion of combat, when my enemies provoke me, I conduct myself bravely. Knowing it is cowardly to enter into a duel, I turn my back on my adversaries without deigning to look them in the face; but I run toward my Jesus. I tell Him I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop to profess my faith

in the existence of heaven. I tell Him, too, I am happy not to enjoy this beautiful heaven on this earth so that He will open it for all eternity to poor unbelievers. Also, in spite of this trial which has taken away all my joy, I can nevertheless cry out: "You have given me DELIGHT, O Lord, in ALL your doings." (Ps. 91) For is there a joy greater than that of suffering out of love for You? The more interior the suffering is and the less apparent to the eyes of creatures, the more it rejoices You, O my God! But if my suffering was really unknown to You, which is impossible, I would still be happy to have it, if through it I could prevent or make reparation for one single sin against faith.

My dear Mother, I may perhaps appear to you to be exaggerating my trial. In fact, if you are judging according to the sentiments I express in my little poems composed this year, I must appear to you as a soul filled with consolations and one for whom the veil of faith is almost torn aside; and yet it is no longer a veil for me, it is a wall which reaches right up to the heavens and covers the starry firmament. When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE. It is true that at times a very small ray of the sun comes to illumine my darkness, and then the trial ceases for an instant, but afterward the memory of this ray, instead of causing me joy, makes my darkness even more dense.

Never have I felt before this, dear Mother, how sweet and merciful the Lord really is, for He did not send me this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it. A little earlier I believe it would have plunged me into a state of discouragement. Now it is taking away everything that could be a natural satisfaction in my desire for heaven. Dear Mother, it seems to me now that nothing could prevent me from flying away, for I no longer have any great desires except that of loving to the point of dying of love. June 9

Introduction to the text:

‘The trial I am suffering for a year now’ (Ms. C, 4v): this refers to the challenge to her faith that began around Easter 1896, in April.

‘You know about this trial’ (Ms. C, 4v): Therese confirms that Mother Marie de Gonzague most likely already knew about the ‘trial of faith’ that Mother Agnes only knew about in 1897.

‘Last year’ (Ms. C, 4v): we keep in mind that, apart from Marie de Gonzague, this account is addressed to Agnes of Jesus.

‘The fast of Lent in all its rigor’ (Ms. C, 4v): nothing in the morning; a meal at 11.30 am with soup, fish, vegetables and dessert (cheese or fruit); no eggs or dairy products; all cooked in water or oil; and finally a small dish at 6 pm, with 6 oz. of bread, no jam, and with raw or dried fruit.

‘On Good Friday’ (Ms. C, 4v): Therese had her first hemoptysis during the night of 2nd to 3rd of April 1895, then a second in the evening of Friday 3rd April (Good Friday). A hemoptysis is a symptom manifested by the emission of blood during a fit of coughing, one of the symptoms of tuberculosis.

‘My soul was flooded with joy’ (Ms. C, 4v): the theme of this whole paragraph does not conceal the happiness felt by Therese at this signal of her approaching death.

‘A country covered in thick fog’ (Ms. C, 5v): one needs to know the town of Lisieux and particularly the basin where the Carmel is located, beside a little stream. At times, you cannot see the building in front of your own!

‘She begs pardon for her brothers’ (Ms. C, 6r): in January 1897, for the first time, Therese designates sinners as her brothers, in Poem 46.

‘She is resigned . . . she does not wish to rise up from this table’ (Ms. C, 6r): this is the total acceptance of her vocation that she had foreseen in 1887, with the Pranzini case (cf. Ms. A, 45v).

‘Without becoming discouraged’ (Ms. C, 6v): always the thersian tenacity, she is never discouraged.

‘I fear I might blaspheme’ (Ms. C, 7r): Therese’s feelings are so horrified, that this is the only time she uses this word in all her writings.

‘Loving to the point of dying of love’ (Ms. C, 7v): the graphic emotion of these last lines show Therese’s exhaustion, who in fact was working in bed, on a very hard straw mattress.

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. Therese suffered very much. We can bring to mind her physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. How is Therese able to help us in our own trials?
2. How does Therese deepen her little way in this context? How does this bear fruit on the mystical and apostolic levels?
3. How does this passage illumine the way to live through spiritual combat? To accept suffering, to attribute meaning to it?
4. In synthesis, what meaning can we give to the trial of faith that Therese experienced? Can I name the trial of my own faith, its meaning, its fruits . . . ?



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