

Reading the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
Teresian Anniversaries 2023-2025
2025: Prayers and other writings

Text 5:
To Celine, 7th July 1894 (Letter 165)

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.

To Celine, 7th July 1894 (Letter 165)

July 7, 1894.

My dear Celine,

Léonie's letter worries us a lot...

Ah! how unhappy she will be if she returns to the world! But I confess to you that I hope it's only a temptation, you have to pray a lot for her. The good Lord can give her what she lacks...

Our Mother is on a long retreat, so she is not going to write to you, she is thinking a lot of you and of Mary, she is going to pray a lot for her two little girls.

I don't know if you're still in the same frame of mind as the other day, but I'm going to tell you anyway about a passage from the Song of Songs which perfectly expresses the state of a soul plunged into dryness and which nothing can rejoice or console: "I went down to the garden of walnut trees, to see the fruits of the valley, to consider whether the vine had blossomed; and if pomegranates had grown... I no longer knew where I was... my soul was troubled because of the chariots of Aminadab" (chap. vi, verses x and xi...).

This is indeed the image of our souls; often we descend into the fertile valleys where our heart loves to nourish itself, the vast field of scriptures which has so often opened before us to spread its rich treasures in our favour, this vast field seems to us to be an arid desert without water... We don't even know where we are anymore, instead of peace and light we only find trouble or at least darkness... But like the bride we know the cause of our trial. Our soul is disturbed by the chariots of Aminadab... We are not yet in our homeland and the trial must purify us like gold in the crucible, we sometimes believe ourselves abandoned, alas! Are the chariots, the meaningless noises which afflict us within us or outside of us? we do not know... but Jesus knows it well, He sees our sadness and suddenly his sweet voice is heard, a voice sweeter than the breath of spring: "Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look upon you. ! " (Song, Ch. 6, 5, 12). Such a call from our

Spouse ! . . . And what ! We no longer dared even look at ourselves, we think we are so lacking in attraction or adornment and Jesus is calling us, He wants to look upon us at leisure ; but not only He, the other two persons of the Holy Trinity are coming with Him to take possession of our soul . . . Jesus had promised it long ago when he was about to ascend to his Father and our Father; He said with ineffable tenderness: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home in him." Keeping the word of Jesus is the only condition of our happiness, the proof of our love for Him. But what is this word?... It seems to me that the word of Jesus is Himself... Him Jesus, the Word, the Word of God!... He tells us this later in the same Gospel of St John, praying to his Father for his disciples. He expresses himself thus: "Sanctify them by your word, your word is truth"; in another place Jesus teaches us that He is the way, the truth, the life. So we know what is the Word that we must keep; we will not ask Jesus, like Pilate, "What is Truth?" We have it, the Truth. We keep Jesus in our hearts!... Many times as the Bride we can say, "Our Beloved is a bunch of myrrh," that He is a bridegroom of blood to us... But how sweet it will be for us to hear one day these sweet words come from the mouth of our Jesus: "It is you who have remained constantly with me in all the trials that I have had, so I have prepared for you my kingdom as my Father has prepared it for me (gospel). The trials of Jesus, what a mystery! So he has trials too? Yes, He has and often He is alone treading the wine in the press, He is looking for comforters and cannot find any... Many serve Jesus when He consoles them, but few consent to keep company with Jesus sleeping on the waves or suffering in the garden of agony!... Who would want to serve Jesus for Himself?... Ah! it will be us... Celine and Therese will unite more and more, in them will be fulfilled this prayer of Jesus: "My Father, may they be one as we are one." Yes, Jesus is already preparing his kingdom for us, as his Father has prepared it for him. He prepares it for us by leaving us in the trial, He wants our face to be seen by creatures, but that it is hidden so that no one recognizes us but He alone!... But also what happiness to think that the Good God, the entire Trinity is watching us, that it is within us and enjoys looking upon us. But what does the Trinity want to see in our heart? if not "music choirs in an army camp?" (Song ch. vii, v. 1) "How then can we sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land?... For a long time our harps have been suspended from the willows of the shore. We cannot use them!"... Our God, the guest of our soul knows this well, so He comes to us with the intention of finding a home, an EMPTY tent in the midst of the battlefield of the earth. He asks only that and He Himself is the Divine Musician who takes care of the concert... Ah! If we could hear this ineffable harmony, if a single vibration reached our ears !

"We don't know how to ask for anything properly, but it is the Spirit who asks in us with groans that cannot be expressed" (St Paul). We therefore have only to deliver our soul, to abandon it to our great God. What does it matter then that it is without gifts that shine on the outside since within shines the King of Kings with all his glory! How great a soul must be to contain a God! ... and yet the soul of a day-old child is a Paradise of delights to him, what will it be like for ours who have struggled, suffered to steal the heart of their Beloved?...

My darling Céline, I assure you that I don't know what I'm telling you, it shouldn't have any sequel, but it seems to me that you're going to understand all the same!... I would like to tell you so many things!...

Don't answer me a long letter to tell me about your soul, a single short word will suffice, I prefer that you write a very amusing letter for everyone. The good Lord wants me to forget myself, to give pleasure.

I kiss my good Uncle, my dear Aunt, and my little Sister. For my darling Papa, I smile at him and guard him through his VISIBLE angel to whom I am so intimately united that we are one!...

*Therese of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face
rel.carm.ind.*

Introduction to the Text

Here we are changing register to look at one or two of her numerous letters. There are 276 letters dating from 4th April 1877 to 24th August 1897. They are addressed to 26 different recipients, including 9 members of Martin and Guerin families.

Celine is Therese's favoured correspondent during the six years of her 'exile', before her entry into the Carmel (14/09/1894).

The letter we have chosen here is addressed her sister Celine on 7th July 1894, while the latter was on holiday at the La Musse property of the Guerin family (the family of Therese's mother and her uncle, Isidore). The Guerin family arrived on 4th July, accompanied by M. Martin and Celine.

This letter occurs while her sister, Mother Agnes was prioress (February 1893-March 1896). The first months of her priorate unfolded in euphoria. For Therese it was a time of rest in a valley. But an internal call soon pulled her away from her oasis. The autumn and winter of 1893-1894 witnessed a vigorous effort at stripping herself, not without interruptions. The path of her exodus then passed by a new 'desert, arid and without water', as shown by the letter we have proposed.

The letter is full of quotations from Scripture, explicit and implicit, that spring spontaneously from Therese's heart.

Therese corresponded intensely with Celine, particularly in 1893 (Lt 141 to 145, 147 and 149) and in 1894 (LT 161-162, 165, 167 to 169). Being very at ease with her sister, she expressed herself freely. These letters are therefore a treasure for exploring Therese's heart. Those who wish, may therefore reread some of those letters, or even the letters that Celine addressed to Therese.

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. On reading Letter 165, how does Therese read and interpret Scripture?
2. «Keeping Jesus' word, that's the only condition of our happiness, the proof of our love for Him, But what is this word? . . . It seems to me that the word of Jesus, it's He Himself, the Word, the Word of God!» What is our experience of the Word of God, in the light of this conviction of Therese?
3. «We just have to give up our soul, to abandon it to our great God. What does it matter if it has no gifts glittering on the exterior, since inside shines the King of Kings in all His glory!» Do we believe that Jesus «alone arranges the events of our life in exile?» (LT 149)? In what sense can we understand that Jesus is guiding all that we live?