

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

**Text 6:
To Father Roulland, 9th May 1897 (Letter 226)**

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 Father Roulland, 9th May 1897 (Letter 226)

J.MJ.T.

Carmel de Lisieux

9th May 1897

My Brother,

I received with joy, or rather with emotion, the relics that you were good enough to send me, your letter is almost a goodbye letter for Heaven, it seemed to me as I read it that I heard the story of the trials of your ancestors in the apostolate.

On this earth where everything changes, only one thing remains stable, it is the conduct of the King of heaven with regard to his friends; since he raised the standard of the Cross, it is in its shadow that all must fight and win the victory: "All missionary life is fruitful on the Cross" said Th. Vénard, and again: "True happiness is to suffer. And to live we must die."

My Brother, the beginnings of your apostolate are marked with the seal of the cross, the Lord treats you as privileged; it is much more by persecution and by suffering than by brilliant preaching that He wishes to consolidate his reign in souls. You say, "I'm still a little child that can't talk." Father Mazel, who was ordained a priest the same day as you, could not speak either, however he has already picked the palm... Oh! that the divine thoughts are above ours!... On learning of the death of this young missionary whom I heard named for the first time, I felt inclined to invoke him, I seemed to see him in Heaven in the glorious choir of Martyrs. I know that in the eyes of men his martyrdom does not bear this name, but in the eyes of the good God this inglorious sacrifice is no less fruitful than those of the first Christians who confessed their faith before the courts. Persecution has changed form, Christ's apostles have not changed sentiments, so their Divine Master cannot change his rewards except to increase them in comparison with the glory which is denied them here below.

I do not understand, my brother, that you seem to doubt your immediate entrance into Heaven if the infidels take your life. I know that one must be very pure to appear before the God of all Holiness, but I also know that the Lord is infinitely Just and it is this justice which frightens so

many souls which is the subject of my joy and my trust. To be just is not only to exercise severity to punish the guilty, it is also to recognize right intentions and to reward virtue. I hope as much for God's justice as for his mercy. It is because He is just that "He is compassionate and gentle, slow to punish and full of mercy. Because He knows our frailty, He remembers that we are only dust. As a father has tenderness for his children, so the Lord has compassion on us»... O my Brother, hearing these beautiful and consoling words of the Prophet-King, how can one doubt that the Good Lord cannot open the doors of his kingdom to his children who loved him to the point of sacrificing everything for him, who not only left their family and their homeland to make him known and loved, but also wanted to give their lives for the one they loved... Jesus was right to say that there is no greater love than this!

How, then, would He allow Himself to be overcome in generosity? How would He purify in the flames of purgatory souls consumed with the fires of divine love? It is true that no human life is free from faults, only the Immaculate Virgin presents herself absolutely pure before the Divine Majesty. What joy to think that this Virgin is our mother! Since she loves us and knows our weakness, what do we have to fear? Here are many sentences to express my thoughts or rather to fail to do so, I simply wanted to say that it seems to me that all missionaries are martyrs by desire and will, and that therefore not one should go to purgatory. If there remains in their soul at the moment of appearing before God some trace of human weakness, the Blessed Virgin obtains for them the grace to make a perfect act of love and then gives them the palm and the crown which they have so well deserved.

That, my Brother, is what I think of the justice of the good God, my way is entirely one of trust and love, I do not understand the souls who are afraid of such a tender Friend. Sometimes when I read certain spiritual treatises in which perfection is shown through a thousand obstacles, surrounded by a host of illusions, my poor mind gets tired very quickly, I close the learned book which breaks my head and dries up my heart and I take the Holy Scripture. So everything seems luminous to me, a single word reveals infinite horizons to my soul, perfection seems easy to me, I see that it suffices to recognize one's nothingness and to abandon oneself like a child in the arms of the Good Lord. Leaving to great souls, to great minds the beautiful books that I cannot understand, let alone put into practice, I rejoice in being little since only children and those who look like them will be admitted to the celestial banquet. I am very happy that there are several mansions in the kingdom of God, because if there were only the one whose description and path seem incomprehensible to me, I could not enter it. I would like, however, not to be too far from your residence; in consideration of your merits, I hope that the good Lord will give me the grace to participate in your glory, just as on earth the sister of a conqueror, even if she were deprived of the gifts of nature, participates despite her poverty, to the honours rendered to her brother.

The first act of your ministry in China seemed delightful to me. The little soul whose mortal remains you blessed was indeed to smile upon you and promise her protection to you and yours. How I thank you for counting me among them! I am also deeply touched and grateful for the memory you have at Holy Mass for my dear parents. I hope they are now in possession of Heaven towards which all their actions and desires were directed; that does not prevent me from praying for them, because it seems to me that blessed souls receive great glory from the prayers which are made for them and which they can dispose of for other suffering souls.

If, as I believe, my father and my mother are in Heaven, they must look and bless the brother whom Jesus gave me. They had so longed for a missionary son!... I was told that before I was born, my parents hoped that their wish would finally come true. If they could have penetrated the veil of the future, they would have seen that it was indeed through me that their desire would be accomplished; since a missionary has become my brother, he is also their son, and in their prayers they cannot separate the brother from his unworthy sister.

You pray, my Brother, for my parents who are in heaven, I often pray for yours who are still on earth, it is for me a very sweet obligation and I promise you to be always faithful to fulfil it, even if

I leave exile and then even more perhaps, since I will know better the graces that will be necessary for them; and then, when their race here below is finished, I will come to seek them in your name and will introduce them to Heaven. How sweet will be the family life we will enjoy for all eternity!

While waiting for this blessed eternity, which in a short time will open up for us, since life is only a day, let us work together for the salvation of souls; I can do very little, or rather absolutely nothing if I were alone, what consoles me is to think that by your side I can be of some use; indeed the zero by itself has no value, but placed near unity it becomes powerful, provided however that it puts itself on the right side, after and not before!... That's just where Jesus placed me and I hope to remain there always, following you from afar, through prayer and sacrifice.

If I listened to my heart I wouldn't finish my letter today, but the end of the silence is about to ring, I have to take my letter to our good Mother who is waiting for it.

So I beg you, my brother, to kindly send your blessing to the little zero that the Good Lord has placed near you.

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

Introduction to the text :

Father Adolphe Roulland of the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) was Therese's second spiritual brother, following Fr. Maurice Belliere. While still at the Seminary, he asked the Carmel of Lisieux for a spiritual sister. Mother Marie de Gonzague, prioress at the time, chose Therese. On 20th June 1896, eight days before his ordination and having received the reply, he wrote to the prioress to thank her for having given him « an auxiliary angel in my apostolate . . . Thanks to the prayers that will be made for me at the Carmel, I will win souls for our God ». After being ordained as priest on 28th June 1896, he went to the Carmel on the 3rd July following, and conversed in the parlour with Therese.

The eight letters addressed to Adolphe Roulland convey a deep and mystic alliance, which Therese worked on to define and deepen further during the last months of her life.

It is in this climate that Therese was also drawn by the prospect of mission; long before taking responsibility for her two missionary priests, Therese was drawn by the idea of becoming an apostle. But not just to be a simple apostle. Therese wanted to become the Apostle of the apostles. Therese did not want to be the first among the Twelve, but put herself in the principal role of receiving the Good News – before the mission started – before becoming the initiator of the apostolic mission, like Mary of Magdala returning from the tomb.

In the fire of this personal commitment to mission, she proposed to Father Roulland a definition of the apostolic union that was already more explicit : the latter no longer involved the union of two beings, but extended to the gift of God, who alone can respond to the missionary's prayer by lighting up Therese's heart so as to awaken souls for God ; the connection between Therese and the missionary is not direct, as Roulland imagined it, but indirect ; and in Therese's mind, her prayer would not touch the missionary but, by the grace of God, the heart of unbelievers directly : « Not being able to be a missionary in action, I wanted to be one by love and penitence, »

Father Roulland was to be a missionary in China, from where he corresponded with Therese and the Prioress of the Carmel. Called back to France in 1909, he was a witness at the two Processes of Therese.

The relics that Therese refers to at the start of the letter are locks of Father Roulland's hair.

This letter is a veritable course of theology on the right understanding of what is the justice of God.

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. This essential letter of Therese brings together the evocation of numerous dimensions of her spirituality, at the moment of only a few months before her entry into Life. Based on this letter, we could share with each other on these realities that were essential for Therese :
 - Her understanding of the apostolate in our relationship with Christ
 - Her way of understanding divine Justice
 - The place of the Virgin Mary
 - Her evocation of purgatory
 - Her way of envisaging retribution
2. How should we characterize perfection in relation to holiness, as Therese presents them here ?
3. We could also share with each other on the role, influence and importance of the communion of saints and prayer of intercession in our lives. (For example, how do we live out the prayers of intercession in the offices of Lauds and Vespers?)
4. Note her insistence on the unavoidable reality of imperfections in the spiritual life. How do we experience them in our own lives ?