



Frequently, only silence
can express my prayer.

- St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Marie-Francoise-Therese Martin was born on January 2, 1873, and baptized two days later January 4th. "All my life, God surrounded me with love. My first memories are imprinted with the most tender smiles and caresses...Those were the sunny years of my childhood." Thus Therese, twenty-one years later, described her home life in Alencon, France. "My happy disposition," she added with characteristic candor, "contributed to making my life pleasing."

Therese was not yet fifteen when she approached the Carmelite authorities again for permission to enter. Again, she was refused. The priest-director advised her to return when she was twenty-one. "Of course," he added, "you can always see the bishop. I am only his delegate." The priest did not realize what kind of girl he was dealing with.

To his dying day, Bishop Hugonin of Bayeux never forgot her. She came to his office with her father one rainy day and put her surprising request before him. "You are not yet fifteen and you wish this?" the bishop questioned. "I wished it since the dawn of reason," young Therese declared.

Just before the interview, Therese had put up her hair, thinking this would make her look older. This amused the bishop, and he never spoke about Therese in later years without recounting her ploy. Although charmed by her, Bishop Hugonin did not immediately grant Therese's request. He wanted time to consider it, and advised Therese and her father that he would write them regarding his decision.



Therese had planned that, should the Bayeux trip fail, she would go to the Pope himself. Thus, in November 1887, she journeyed to Italy with a group of French pilgrims. Catholics from all over the world were journeying to the Eternal City, to celebrate Leo XIII's Golden Jubilee as a priest.

On Sunday, November 20, 1887, "they told us on the Pope's behalf that it was forbidden to speak as this would prolong the audience too much. I turned toward my dear Celine for advice. 'Speak!' she said. A moment later I was at the Holy Father's feet...Lifting tear-filled eyes to his face I cried out: 'Most Holy Father, I have a great favor to ask you...Holy Father, in honor of your jubilee, permit me to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen.'"

"Well, my child," the Holy Father replied, "do what the superiors tell you." "Resting my hands on his knees," Therese continued, "I made a final effort, saying, 'Oh, Holy Father, if you say yes, everybody will agree!' He gazed at me speaking these words and stressing each syllable: 'Go - go - you will enter if God wills it.'" Therese did not want to leave the Holy Father's presence, so the papal guards had to lift her up and carry the tearful young girl to the door.

On New Year's Day, 1888, the prioress of the Lisieux Carmel advised Therese she would be received into the monastery, on April 9, 1888. She was 15 years old and 3 months.

St. Therese's service to her Roman Catholic order, though outwardly unremarkable, was later recognized for its spiritual accomplishments. The French Carmelite nun also was known as St. Theresa of Lisieux, or St. Teresa, or St. Therese of the Child Jesus, or The Little Flower.



Why Little Flower?

St. Therese loved nature, and often used the imagery of nature to explain how the Divine Presence is everywhere, and how everything is connected in God's loving care and arms. Therese saw herself as "the Little Flower of Jesus" because she was just like the simple wild flowers in forests and fields, unnoticed by the greater population, yet growing and giving glory to God. Therese did not see herself as a brilliant rose or an elegant lily, but simply as a small wildflower. This is how she understood herself before the Lord - simple and hidden, but blooming where God had planted her.

Therese believed passionately that Jesus was delighted in his "Little Flower," and just as a child can be fascinated by the grandeur of a simple flower, she believed that Jesus was fascinated by her as his "Little Flower." Therese understood that she was just like the tiny flower in the forest, surviving and flourishing through all the seasons of the year. Because of God's grace, she knew that she was stronger than she looked. Following the Carmelite tradition, Therese saw the world as God's garden, and each person being a different kind of flower, enhancing the variety and beauty which Jesus delighted in. When various people tried to explain her powerful inspiration and her place within the Church, it always seemed to come back to one title "the Little Flower."

Novena Rose Prayer

O Little Therese of the Child Jesus, please pick for me a rose from the heavenly gardens and send it to me as a message of love. O Little Flower of Jesus, ask God to grant the favors I now place with confidence in your hands.

(mention in silence here)

St. Therese, help me to always believe as you did in God's great love for me, so that I might imitate your "Little Way" each day. Amen.

