

## Reflection Saturday Week 26 St Thérèse of the child Jesus 2022

**Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus (1873 - 1897).** Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon, France, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1873. Her mother died when Thérèse was four, and the family moved to Lisieux. Thérèse became a nun at the Carmelites aged 15, after a long battle with the superior, who insisted that 16, or even 21, was a more sensible age. She died of tuberculosis aged 24.

In 1895 Mother Agnès of Jesus, the prioress, commanded Thérèse to write her memoirs. Thérèse took a year to fill six exercise books. She presented them to the prioress, who put them away unread. A year after Thérèse's death, 2,000 copies of the memoirs were published. Miracles started to happen: conversions, cures, even apparitions. "We must lose no time in crowning the little saint with glory," said the Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, "if we do not want the voice of the people to anticipate us." She was canonized in 1925. Her parents, Louis and Zélie Martin, were canonized by Pope Francis on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015. Their feast day is 12<sup>th</sup> July.

Aged 17, Thérèse confided to a Jesuit her hope of becoming a great saint and to love God as much as the Carmelite Saint Teresa of Ávila. The Jesuit believed this showed pride and presumption and advised her to moderate her desires. "Why, Father?" asked Thérèse, "since our Lord has said, *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" 100 years after Thérèse's death, Pope John Paul II declared her a Doctor of the Church, joining St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa of Ávila.

What makes St Thérèse so special? Thérèse was physically weak and psychologically vulnerable. For her the great saints were giants, inaccessible mountains, while she was only an "obscure grain of sand;" but she was not discouraged. St John of the Cross taught her that God can never inspire desires that cannot be fulfilled. Proverbs told her, "If anyone is *a very little one*, let him come to me." Scripture is permeated with images of our littleness and weakness with respect to God, and of his care for us.

Thérèse's "Little Way" takes God at his word and lets his love for us wash away our sins and imperfections. When a priest told her that her falling asleep during prayer was due to a want of fervour and fidelity and she should be desolate over it, she wrote "I am not desolate. I remember that little children are just as pleasing to their parents when they are asleep as when they are awake."

We can't all hug lepers or become missionaries and martyrs. But we have daily opportunities of grace. The more we love God, the more we will see them. If we can't advance to Heaven in giant strides, we can do it with tiny steps. Weakness is no excuse for mediocrity.